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a *NEW* secret-agent story by

JACOB HAY

Remember Dagbur Agradamian, the secret agent known as Mr. Omega who made his debut in the March 1968 issue of EQMM? Well, Dag is back—which suggests that his creator, Jacob Hay, has decided to write a series about the huge bearded oil magnate—a welcome development indeed!

Agradamian is a counterespionage agent with a unique "cover": to the world he is a multimillionaire playboy with the flamboyant knack of living like a rajah. Except that it's no fake! He really is the world-famous tycoon that the international society columns say he is! But for purposes of undercover operations, Agradamian has a quality even more important than his wealth and influence and power: he has "a genius for the irregular". . .

THE K. MISSION

by JACOB HAY

Agradamian Does It Again!

CHICAGO, Dec. 1, Inter-Press—Dagbur Agradamian, the fabulously wealthy British oil magnate, stunned financial circles here and in New York by a near-miraculous surprise appearance at the annual meeting of Eurasian Petroleum where he successfully prevented a take-over by Imperial Holdings, Inc., and safely preserved his own close control of Eurasian Petroleum.

How the hugely bearded, always impeccably attired—a gardenia in his lapel is his trademark—multimillionaire managed to escape the attentions of reporters remains a mystery. Financial observers here declared that if word of his coming had gotten out, Imperial Holdings might have obtained the necessary bank assurances to insure his defeat. As it was, Imperial was caught with its guard down, and Agradamian added another vic-

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tory to his long list of business triumphs.

Long a flamboyantly elegant figure in British business and society, Agradamian is known, however, to have a passion for personal privacy, and in this respect has been compared with American multimillionaire Howard Hughes. He declined to discuss any details of his astonishing appearance here, and has again vanished to one or another of the several homes he maintains in Britain and on the Continent.

Reading the dispatch in his copy of *The Telegraph*, Vice-Admiral Sir Richard Appleyard, R.N. (Ret.), known to his friends as "Boy," grinned cheerfully and took another eminently satisfactory swallow of his pint of John Courage in the saloon bar of The Gallant Sailorman, just off the High Street in Budleigh Salterton.

Omega had done it again. "Omega" was the name that the press had bestowed on Mr. Agradamian when it was considered amusing to describe one of his vast talents as "the living end, my dear," and the name had clung so tenaciously that, on one of the rare occasions in his career, Agradamian had bowed to popular fancy and caused to be painted on the gleaming white funnel of his gleaming white yacht a golden Greek omega. The same design was shortly applied to the far-flung fleet of Agradamian tankers.

Once, in the not too distant past, Mr. Omega had done a very personal favor for "Boy" Appleyard, before the latter's retirement from what is euphemistically called "a very sensitive post," and the two were old friends, dating their friendship from Dagbur Agradamian's wildly reckless and vastly effective days as a Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve corvette commander.

Actually, it is not entirely accurate to describe Sir Richard Appleyard as "retired"—not in the strict sense of the word. Men who have held jobs like his never really retire. They may give the appearance of lounging around lovely old country houses in shabby tweeds and doing a bit of pottering with the roses and having the odd pint at the local, but they remain in touch. Very much in touch, you may be sure.

This business of Agradamian in Chicago, now. How had one of the best-known figures in the world of international oil operations succeeded in penetrating to the American heartland without anyone being the wiser? Appleyard dismissed the idea of a chartered private plane. Nor would Agradamian have descended to disguise—assuming it were possible to do anything whatsoever with that great iron-

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gray spade beard and the ferocious mustaches that he wore in grave tribute to his Armenian ancestors. He would have died before shaving them off.

Yet only a few days before, the society pages of the London, Paris, and New York papers had Mr. Agradamian entertaining the cast of an American film company at his villa on Corfu.

Thoughtfully, Sir Richard tamped a battered black briar full of Rattray's. Clearly, his old friend must have traveled by air—but how? Almost certainly some greedy soul working in a plane-chartering service would have tipped off the newspapers, as would some crew member on a commercial flight. Of course, Agradamian might have his own plane, although this hardly seemed likely, since he hated to fly and had frequently declared so in public. Although, Appleyard mused, if it meant protecting his own vast empire, Dagbur Agradamian would venture into the jaws of hell without a second's hesitation. Dilettante and international playboy he might choose to appear—but a fool he wasn't.

Yet there was something here worth pondering, and Appleyard had been doing a lot of pondering since his last visit to London. Not only on the fact that somebody had at last managed to get a measure of decent heating into his old office, and that Miss Shaw-Jones had finally taken the giant step and got herself married. She'd been a damned fine secretary and would make some lucky chap a damned fine wife.

It was Hawker who had handed him the headache. Hawker was still vaguely embarrassed whenever he called his former superior "Boy."

"This is a tricky one," Hawker said unhappily, "and we're stuck with it. What it amounts to is simple. On this coming January fifteenth, General Evgeny Kornetsov will be in West Berlin for some kind of memorial service for Russian troops killed in the battle there. He will, of course, be staying in East Berlin at the Russian headquarters—"

"Kornetsov?" Appleyard had interrupted. "The logistics genius, isn't he?"

Hawker nodded. "Precisely. No reason why, as one of the Russian army's senior top brass, he shouldn't attend a memorial service in West Berlin, of course, but that's not his real reason for being there. Instead, he's coming here to visit us."

"Here!" Appleyard was genuinely startled.

"You'll understand why when I explain the purpose of his visit. What he's coming to discuss are the procedures for supplies from the West in the event of a war with China—how many transport aircraft might be available, what

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quantities of munitions, et cetera. The whole business has to be kept absolutely secret; if it leaked it might even precipitate the Chinese into a preventive war, which is the last thing any of us wants." Hawker smiled wanly. "Kornetsov won't hear of the meeting being held anywhere on the Continent. He seems to have formed a somewhat exaggerated admiration for our security measures. So now all we have to do is get him from West Berlin to England and back again, with no one the wiser."

"Why not a Russian plane, landing at one of our Air Force b a s e s ? ' ' Appleyard countered. "Passenger in civvies descends, is bustled into the customary sinister black limousine, and is whisked off into the night."

"Bound to attract attention. Other ranks see; they go to pubs; they get to nattering. No, we've got to come up with some means of getting the package here and back, and so far nobody's come up with a solution. And time is running out."

A damned sticky situation, Appleyard thought as he drove his elderly Rover sedately away from The Gallant Sailorman toward the mellowed stone home a few miles inland, where his wife, Joan, would probably be readying tea. Turning into his lane he was dumfounded to see one of the more astonishing automobiles in the United Kingdom parked in his drive—Dagbur Agradamian's precisely authentic reproduction of a 1929 Duesenberg phaeton in British racing-green.

"Well, I'm damned," Appleyard muttered as he parked and walked swiftly into the house. There was no mistaking the great rumbling laugh coming from the library. This was positively eerie.

There was a bit more gray in the beard these days, but the big man was as imposing as ever, despite his country tweeds and boots. You would never mistake Mr. Omega for a gamekeeper.

"I've had a tiring few days in the States," Agradamian said as they shook hands, "so I thought I'd run down and impose on you and Joan for a bit of relaxation. This place always does wonders for my morale."

"By all means, Dag. But I confess that I'm astounded. You should be somewhere in the middle of the Atlantic by my reckoning. Apparently you've finally acquired a magic carpet."

Mr. Omega chuckled, pleased. "No magic, my dear Boy. Simple logistics."

At which point Joan Appleyard entered, followed by old Mrs. Wheelwright, bearing tea and her customary expression of solicitude for her mistress.

"Devonshire cream," cried Mr. Omega joyously. "The true food of the gods, I swear."

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Thus it was not until after dinner, when Joan had gone upstairs to finish reading the latest in the series of detective novels of which she never seemed to tire, that Appleyard had the opportunity to discuss, in the most general of terms, his problem. Typically, Agradamian made no effort to probe deeper.

"So there it is, Dag. We've a very important Very Important Person to get from West Berlin to Ealingham Hall which, as you probably don't know, is by way of being what's called a 'safe house,' staffed entirely by our own people, all of whom can be trusted absolutely."

"This Ealingham Hall—has it a courtyard?"

"As a matter of fact, yes. Quite a large one, too."

Mr. Agradamian nodded, his expression thoughtful. "That will be a help."

"Then you think it's possible?"

"Of course it's possible, Boy. Quite simple, really."

"But how?" There was a hint of exasperation in Appleyard's question, and Agradamian grinned.

"Why not let me take care of it?"

"You know quite well I can't ask you to undertake this sort of operation."

"You haven't asked. I've just volunteered. After all the dull financial types and their proxies I've been dealing with lately, a bit of sport would be just the thing."

"Dammit, Dag, this is not sport! It's a deadly serious affair—just how serious I can't begin to tell you."

"The more reason to succeed, then. My dear chap, I don't know who your VIP is, and I don't want to know. You say this meeting is scheduled for January sixteenth, one day after your person arrives in Berlin. That should present no problem—if he will be good enough to cooperate fully. You say there is to be a reception at the Grand Europe Hotel following this memorial ceremony. That would be at about four, shall we say? If your 'package,' as you keep calling him, can be at the tradesmen's delivery entrance of the hotel at four thirty, we'll accomodate him."

This was terribly irregular, Appleyard thought, but Dagbur Agradamian had a genius for the irregular. Hawker would be desperately unhappy with the arrangement, and there was no point whatsoever in telling the Americans about the affair. The Americans operated by the book, and Mr. Omega wasn't in any book yet published, publicly or privately. But if Dagbur Agradamian could make himself vanish from view completely, perhaps he could do as much for somebody else.

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"At precisely four thirty-five a large van will back up to the delivery entrance of the Berlin hotel. It will bear the legend *Nettleton's Glasswares* on its sides. The driver will come around to the back and open the rear doors. Meanwhile, his mate will enter the delivery way itself and set off a smoke bomb. In the ensuing seconds your package will enter the van which, naturally, will drive rapidly away to avoid catching fire. He will reappear in the courtyard of your Ealingham Hall," Mr. Omega concluded triumphantly.

Well, no one else had come up with an idea, Appleyard thought unhappily.

And what, he wondered, would the world think of one of its wealthiest capitalists going to the rescue of a Russian General? Not that the world would ever know, he hoped fervently, and if it ever did learn it might not be around long enough to relish the irony.

As Appleyard had anticipated, Hawker was, to say the least, distressed when the bare bones of the scheme were presented to him.

"Confound it, man, do you suppose I would have come all the way from Devon to London if I didn't think there was a hope?" Appleyard finally exploded. "I grant you, Kornetsov has handed us a set of damn near impossible conditions, but think of the alternative—the possibility of a Red Chinese army looking across the Channel towards Dover."

"We're taking the very devil of a chance, you know."

"Do we have a choice?"

Hawker shrugged his concession.

"The finest Christmas present of my life," Mr. Agradamian boomed when Appleyard dropped by the sumptuous flat in Belgravia that the bearded giant called home when he was in London. Spence, his manservant, was pouring a bottle of a sweet Armenian wine which Appleyard secretly disliked. "Have a glass of my sugar-water, Boy, and when this is all over I'll tell you how it all works."

"*If* it works," Appleyard replied soberly.

"It will," came the confident answer.

Appleyard spent a particularly wretched Christmas, made the more so by Joan's absence. They had planned to spend the holiday with their only daughter in Copenhagen, where she was married to a promising youngster with the British Embassy there. Appleyard insisted that Joan keep the date, and pleaded urgent business in Britain. With 25 years of marriage behind her, Joan had recognized the tone of his voice and hadn't argued.

Meantime, there was not a blessed word from Dagbur Agradamian during the difficult period

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of working out the details of General Kornetsov's visit with the Russians in Berlin; and the Russians, as usual, were difficult—even more so, in fact, since only one of them, the KGB station chief, knew the real nature of the situation. It is not every day that the Russian staff in Berlin is ordered to turn one of its army's top generals over to British Intelligence for a couple of days. To add to the difficulties, the Americans were getting restive. If the Kornetsov mission became known, it could mean even worse problems in Korea and Vietnam. Was this meeting really necessary?

Now the security precautions at Ealingham Hall, which stands in its own vast park in a part of the United Kingdom which need not concern us here, are such that only a microbe can penetrate freely; but these security precautions are largely invisible, since one does not wish to arouse the curiosity of one's neighbors. Much better that one's neighbors be under the impression that Ealingham Hall housed nothing more exciting than a Ministry of Agriculture Experimental Station. Under the circumstances, then, Appleyard had taken all the necessary steps to insure that should Mr. Agradamian's Deusenberg show itself at the gatekeeper's lodge it should be admitted immediately.

But at 11:00 P.M. on January 16th there was still no sign of Mr. Agradamian or his Duesenberg at Ealingham Hall. What there was a sign of was panic, subdued but very real. The handful of NATO officers who would brief General Kornetsov had arrived and were comfortably established in the library where a well-supplied bar was in operation, but of the Russian they had come to brief not a word.

Outside in the cobbled courtyard Hawker paced feverishly while Appleyard smoked his pipe in grim silence. Hawker was not the man to lower himself to an "I told you so," and Appleyard was not yet ready to concede that Mr. Omega had failed. The telegram had been unmistakable in its meaning when it had arrived at Appleyard's home that morning: EXPECT DELIVERY SHIPMENT NETTLETON'S GLASSWARES TODAY. Minutes later, Appleyard was pushing the elderly Rover hard across the British countryside in the direction of Ealingham Hall.

It was 11:45 P.M. when the gatekeeper at the Hall, whose worn corduroys belied his status as a Sergeant of the Welsh Regiment, phoned that Nettleton's van had arrived. It was 11:48 P.M. when the big trailer rig rumbled into the courtyard and ground to a halt. Its engine fell silent and the driver climbed down and approached Hawker and Appleyard.

"Admiral Appleyard, sir?" Ap-

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pleyard nodded. "Receipt, sir. If you'll just sign here." The driver held a flashlight over the flimsy form.

"Received from Nettleton's Glasswares one important package," Appleyard read, and for the first time in many days he grinned as he signed. Then, to his astonishment, the driver and his mate silently proceeded to unhitch the boxlike trailer and then drive off down the lane into the night. Now what the bloody hell?

At which juncture the rear double doors of the trailer swung silently open and Appleyard stared up from the dimly lighted courtyard to perceive that the trailer was full of plywood cartons. Even as he stared, the center tier of cartons swung smoothly outward and to one side. In the glowing rectangle of light that now appeared loomed the large figure of Dagbur Agradamian.

"Your package, gentlemen," he announced amiably, "and one of the finest gin-rummy players it's been my pleasure to meet." He jumped down from the trailer nimbly, as befitted a squash player in excellent condition, to make way for General Evgeny Kornetsov, who was wearing the sort of civiilan suit that only Russian tailors seem able to produce.

While Hawker led the General into the vast entry hall of the manor house of Ealingham, Dagbur Agradamian hauled himself back aboard the trailer and led the fascinated Appleyard into its interior, which might have been mistaken for the mahogany-paneled owner's cabin of a luxurious motor cruiser, complete with an enclosed john and a miniscule electric galley. Along one side was a comfortable-looking berth; ranged against the other were an armchair and a table. Several etchings adorned the windowless walls. As Appleyard gaped in amazement, Agradamian opened a cupboard and removed from their specially padded racks a bottle of brandy and two glasses, with which he proceeded to do the proper things.

"Highly efficient, my dear Boy, wouldn't you say?" he asked genially, lifting his own glass.

"But you couldn't have driven—I mean, the time element—" Appleyard broke off.

"Of course I didn't drive, old son. I flew. Or, rather, I should say that we—your guest and I—were flown."

"Impossible! Not a trailer this size!"

"Not quite, actually. But this, Boy, is not really a trailer. It's what is called a 'container.' You should spend more time at Tilbury Docks, old son. Containers are all the rage these days." Mr. Omega took a satisfied sip of his brandy.

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"What you do, in essence, is take a simple steel or aluminum box, twenty feet long, roughly eight feet wide and eight feet high, and load it up with whatever you choose at your factory. Then you put it aboard a flatcar, you see, ship it to the nearest docks or airport, send it wherever you choose by ship or plane, have it unloaded onto a freight car, and have it arrive intact wherever you want it to arrive.

"As you well know, I despise flying. Simply looking out of a plane's window, even when it's on the ground, gives me vertigo. But all passenger planes have windows. So when these containers began appearing on the scene a few years back, I sensed that here might be the solution to my problem, because it has become increasingly necessary for me to fly, yet at the same time avoiding the publicity involved, alas, with a commercial flight. What could be more comfortable, then, than a *personal* container?"

"What, indeed?" Appleyard murmured. Mr. Agradamian looked grave.

"But it is forbidden to commercial freight airlines to carry people, right? So the answer was to charter my own cargo plane. What could be more anonymous that the arrival of a cargo plane and its anonymous container? You understand, naturally, that this is no ordinary container: certain modifications were necessary, such as soundproofing—I cannot abide the noise of jet engines—emergency oxygen, provision for internal pressurization, and all that."

"But the expense must have been fantastic," Appleyard protested weakly.

"A trifle when you consider the results."

"So that was how you managed the Chicago business?"

Agradamian nodded happily. "I simply had myself shipped to Chicago. There's no messing about in air terminals when you fly air freight. All the comforts of home, and apart from a few uncomfortable seconds during take-off, no vertigo, because there are no windows. I mix myself a drink, read an improving paperback detective novel, and hey, presto!—I arrive safe and sound. After which a bloody great forklift or something deposits my giant shoebox aboard a trailer and off we go."

"But emigration and customs—" Appleyard argued. "All the formalities, the regulations?"

"When it is convenient, these matters can be tactfully arranged, and quite legally. When it is not convenient—as, shall we say, this evening—well, again, these things can be arranged." Mr. Agradamian's smile would have made his Armenian ancestors proud.

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"And when this conference is over—?" But Appleyard already knew the answer.

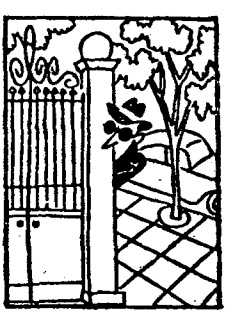
"Simple. *Nettleton's Glasswares* will make another delivery to the tradesmen's entrance of the Grand Europe Hotel in Berlin." Dagbur Agradamian's smile was beatific. "After which it might be best if *Nettleton's Glasswares* ceased to send its containerized cargoes to the Continent for a time. I think I could travel quite as comfortably as *Spooner's Marmalade*."

"D'you know, Dag," Appleyard said slowly as he finished the last sip of his brandy, "I'm damned glad you're on our side."

He would, Appleyard thought to himself as the brandy warmed his innards, have to get cracking with a memo to the right people: *Containers: Possibilities for Illegal Shipments and Suggestions for Prevention Thereof.*

No. On second thought, let the Customs people figure it out for themselves. They were, after all, expected to be abreast of all new developments in transportation. Meanwhile, Mr. Agradamian's container might prove quite useful. One had heard reports that the Rumanian deputy chief of counterespionage desired to defect to more tolerant climes. But did the Rumanians eat *that* much marmalade?

Appleyard was still chuckling when Hawker rejoined him in the courtyard. Above them loomed the dark, silent bulk of the container on its trailer. Mr. Agradamian had retired for the night.



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another pair of ***NEW*** procedurals featuring

NICOLAS FREELING's Van der Valk

and

J. J. MARRIC's (John Creasey's) Gideon

The fourth in Nicolas Freeling's new series about Van der Valk, Chief Inspector of Amsterdam's Juvenile Brigade . . . a story about drugs—particularly, about marijuana—and the Swinging Younger Set and Van der Valk cast in the role of a swinging tourist out for kicks in the Valley of Peace. But, as in the other stories in this series, there is also the thread of Jean de la Fontaine's fables—in this case, the one about the dolphin and the monkey . . .

VAN DER VALK AND THE GREAT POT PROBLEM

by NICOLAS FREELING

POOR OLD VAN DER VALK, THE new Chief Inspector, was in trouble again. The Great Pot Problem. Arlette, his wife, got the giggles every time it turned up. When her children were tiny she had taken the duties of Mama very seriously, subscribing to a magazine on baby care. Full of English nannies, kindergarten teachers, pediatricians and psychologists, all intense and earnest, and all preoccupied by the Great Pot Problem. "The judicial authorities," she discovered gleefully, "have an Anal Fixation."

Van der Valk too found it all a lot of nonsense.

"I've read up on the subject. Standard tomes mention marijuana with shocked relish, like an old woman coming in to report an indecent exposure. All folklore, if you ask me."

The judicial authorities didn't

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ask him. Indecent exposure might be Corrective Training but pot meant Preventive Detention and plenty of it. Senior policemen had been thrown into an uproar because Pot had once again reared its ugly head in the press.

"I think I care for Rome, on the whole, more than I do for Paris."

Van der Valk didn't even blush saying it; he had been cast, to his disgust, in the role of Agent Provocateur. Not in any waterfront café, where he would have been recognized and booed off the stage on short notice. He was in the bar of the Transcontinental, one leg crossed negligently over the other, wearing his best suit and a sweety of a silk tie, bought by Arlette in Paris. Arlette was the key to this; pot was appearing in the haunts of the Swinging Younger Set, and he was the only policeman to be found who could be inserted into places like the Transcontinental without outrage.

"This guy," said Commissaire Boersma, grinning maliciously into the telephone, "has been to Saint Tropez and everything. Got a French wife, collects the right records—practically plays the guitar."

Van der Valk, listening, squirmed.

"As of now," Boersma told him with relish, "you are a swinging tourist out for kicks."

"Kicks," groaned Van der Valk, gazing at the Commissaire's size forty-four shoes under the desk, "will be what I get. Very well, I'll be the bat making friends with the weasel."

"What did you say?"

"I am a mouse—Up the Rats; Jupiter confound all Cats."

"Very nice," said the head cat approvingly.

The young man with whom he had now struck up a bountiful friendship was a bit over the Juvenile Department age limit, but not much. Twenty-one maybe. But it's the experience that counts, said the young man's negligent way of leaning one elbow on the bar.

"Nowhere like little old New York," he remarked, with a knowing wink.

Van der Valk was drinking daiquiris and provoking a delicious recklessness born of Bacardi rum.

"What are you drinking there? Barman, another for this gentleman," said Van der Valk. "Yes, Manhattan's a pretty good island as islands go. No, I prefer French cigarettes, many thanks. Though perhaps my favorite cigarette is the good old Valley of Peace." The daiquiri induced a fantasy born of reading Chester Himes. "Yes, man, that corner of Seventh Avenue and Hundred-and-twenty-fifth—"

He wasn't at all sure he'd got

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it right but he scored a bull's-eye and was being regarded with respect. Ha, he was one up!

"No doubt about it," said the young man sententiously, "islands are the thing."

"But when I think of the old days on Bali—"

Two up! Boy, what a tennis player. Big serve and then the little old drop shot. So now—drunkenly mixing metaphors—lead from strength.

"What's your favorite island now?" asked Van der Valk.

"Lot to be said for Capri."

"Ah. But I'll tell you a secret. I like girls."

The young man gave a raucous bellow of laughter. Van der Valk was pleased he was so easy, but found him a bit distasteful.

At least he wasn't pimply. Indeed he was very clean, with the cleanness of a color Sunday supplement about yachting in the Caribbean. Blue blazer with silver buttons, each with a tiny King of Hearts vividly and expensively e n a m e l e d in. White silk turtleneck. Pale gray f l a n n e l trousers, gray lisle socks with white daisies, pale gray suède loafers. Sunbleached hair that was beautifully groomed. Van der Valk felt that this peacock must be encouraged to preen.

"You look like a fellow who would cut a sharp figure on water skis." The tan was so evenly deep.

"I'm not so bad," the young man said modestly. "My slalom's pretty wiggy but my jumps need more work."

Van der Valk slipped a little flat box out of his pocket. This had once contained an expensive eyeshadow which Arlette threw away because—familiar story—the package had m o r e quality than the contents. From this he palmed a pill, threw a self-consciously furtive g l a n c e around the bar, and tossed it down hoping that a Milk of Magnesia tablet went well with Bacardi.

"Like one?"

"What are they?"

"Speed."

"Sure thing. Thanks. You were talking about the Valley o f Peace—"

"That's right. But I'm a stranger here, I don't mind admitting. Haven't been meeting the right pushers lately. Now you're Dutch. This is y o u r territory—why don't you show me around?"

"How d'you like your peace?"

"Honey-cured."

"Kind of a tall order."

"I was taking you for a fellow who knows his way about," said Van der Valk in a disappointed voice.

"A couple of girls?"

"Sounds nice but you know the sayings of Confucius—give me a lever and I'll move the world."

The young man leaned forward,

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importantly. Perhaps the Milk of Magnesia worked smoother on vodka. "I know where we can get fixed. But it comes high."

"That's all right," said Van der Valk with an affectionate clip on the young man's shoulder. "We'll bill it to the tax inspector."

There was another raucous shout of laughter but it went unnoticed; most of the men at the bar were well juiced by this time. Ten eleven, Van der Valk noticed automatically. I have plenty of protective coloration, he thought. Act a bit drunk—nothing like really being a bit drunk. I only hope we avoid the night-club circuit.

He was not only afraid of being bored, he was uneasy at being recognized. Amsterdam is the only place in Holland where there is any underworld; but that underworld is quite professional and makes a point of recognizing plainclothes policemen, even when they are disguised as tourists.

Outside he looked about. He had a friend somewhere, with a hopped-up Mini. The young man had a Triumph sports car, a little small for Van der Valk's long legs.

They headed out of town, toward Amsterdam's country-club district near the Loosdrecht lakes, where the rich go dinghy sailing and like their houses built with verandas over the water and a small private dock below. They stopped at an ordinary Dutch café on the lake shore. Not an opium den: clean, well-lit, banal. It did have a more sophisticated collection of records than most cafés, and some customers under the Juvenile Department age limit; but all were innocently drinking Coca Cola.

"Not much action here."

"You'd be surprised," the young man said defensively.

Van der Valk got the point. Boats for hire and girls looking for thrills. A few of these juvenile sports cars, a few more of the Harley-Davidson bangbang bikes. Petting parties on the lake and never mind the mosquitoes. Subtly expensive hi-fi.

The barman was an obstacle—a gray, careful little Dutchman with suspicious eyes who would have made a good manager of a credit bureau. Van der Valk wondered if he were the owner, in which case he was making nice money—there was plenty about. This was one of the wealthiest square kilometers in Holland. But the little Dutchman was wary, and seemed not to care greatly for Van der Valk. The young man was annoyed at all this reticence.

"What gives, Frans?"

"What do you mean, what gives?"

"Come on, Frans—you know me."

"I know you, Max."

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"Well, hell, why the tight-lipped act then? Let's have a bit of warmth."

"Who's your friend, Max?"

"Pal from France—or from little old Manhattan Island," the young man laughed heartily.

"I'm a dolphin," said Van der Valk jovially. "I swim around."

"And where's your home port?" inquired the barman.

"Liège." It was safe enough, and would account for his accent. He made his voice impatient. "Come on, Max, how about getting back to town?"

"What about the girls then?" his companion muttered. "Some I know around here are pretty good lot. Like to ride dolphins," he added with a sly grin.

"I like to get into the right mood."

"Leave it to me, leave it to me." And the young man put a lot of work into standing on tiptoe and whispering confidentially to the barman, who was not an easy oyster to open. It took some gin and twenty-five minutes during which the barman sipped the gin grudgingly. At last he said, with a politeness that did not come easily, "You gentlemen like some cigars?"

"Sure I would—when they're good ones. I'm sure they're good ones." Van der Valk's voice had a greasy emphasis.

"Ought to be—expensive enough," said Max with an awkward guffaw. "What's the damage, Frans?"

"One ton," the barman said in a lipless, toneless mutter—exactly, thought Van der Valk; like an old James Cagney movie about the Big House.

"You don't happen to have two fifties for a hundred?" Van der Valk asked with a studied, casual loudness.

Frans produced a little tin box of small cheap cigars and slid it across to Van der Valk.

"Two twenty," the barman intoned, polishing the counter with a cloth. "And another Scotch, gentlemen? Will I put that down with the rest?"

Van der Valk stretched and yawned cavernously.

"What I'd like now would be a moonlight swim."

A little man who had arrived in a cream-colored Mini and had been drinking beer quietly in the corner by the record player, tapping a foot contentedly, now got up and walked over to the bar. He put a friendly hand on each shoulder.

"You're all under arrest," he said unemotionally.

It's too juicy a coincidence to miss, thought Van der Valk. It was an hour later in the local police bureau. The local boys, fussy over their prerogatives, were grilling Frans and zealously opening every cigar box they could

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find—having, in short, a lovely time. He himself had been given the unhappy, now sweaty Max.

"Dolphin," said the young gentleman bitterly. "Double-crossing snake!"

"No, no," disagreed Van der Valk mildly. "Dolphin, definitely. There's even a story about a dolphin—remember your de la Fontaine?—which I'll tell you because it's so instructive. A monkey wanting to get away from Athens—on his way to Tunis, let's say—hitched a ride on a dolphin's back. Along the way he made conversation and was pretty full of his important friends back in Athens. 'I can get things done for you,' he boasted; 'just say the word.' The dolphin was pretty impressed. 'So,' he said politely, 'then you must certainly know Piraeus.' 'Piraeus?' said the monkey, 'sure, sure—he and I are like that together.' So the dolphin laughed, drowned the monkey, and went back for someone with less mouth and more mind. Bear it in mind the next time you go water skiing. Slaloms and jumps are not *water* skiing, my friend—but you won't have to worry about that for a while, I'm afraid."

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a *NEW* Gideon by

J. J. MARRIC (John Creasey)

first publication in the United States

The fourth in J. J. Marric's (John Creasey's) new series about Gideon, the Commander of the C.I.D. (the Criminal Investigation Department of Scotland Yard)—a story about a summer crime wave in Soho and the victimizing of rich American tourists and a possible crisis in Anglo-American relations. But, as in the other stories in this series, you can leave it to George Gideon to thread the needle of truth. . . .

GIDEON AND THE PICKPOCKETS

by J. J. MARRIC (John Creasey)

CRIME WAS COMMON TO ALL strata of society, as Gideon knew well. That was to be expected from the Commander of the C.I.D., the Criminal Investigation Department at New Scotland Yard. However, crime was thicker in some strata than in others. A murder or theft, assault or arson, blackmail or fraud, might take place in Hampstead, St. John's Wood, or Mayfair, or in Soho itself; but the crime strata in Soho were much thicker than in those other, more law-abiding districts.

This did not affect Gideon's deep affection for Soho.

Being as notorious for its vice as it was famous for its food, Soho naturally attracted the unpleasant type as well as the gourmet. Many unpleasant human beings *were* gourmets. The fact that many criminals were in different ways pleasant and kindly was a lesson which Gideon had learned when he was a young policeman.

Soho, this particular summer, was going through one of its trying periods.

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Every visitor to London wanted to go there at least once, of course, including every American, and some Americans were quite wealthy. In the past few weeks far too many rich Americans had been robbed in Soho, together with some French, a few Italians, an occasional German, and naturally a few from other nationalities. All the world came to Soho.

The Central Division of the Metropolitan Police handled the area, and most of the robbery complaints were routine. This summer, however, so many reports came in that a worried Divisional Superintendent telephoned Commander Gideon.

Gideon wasn't in the office, but his second in command, Lemaitre, was. When Gideon arrived from a conference with the Assistant Commissioner and the other commanders, Lemaitre flicked a message across to him. Lemaitre could flick with remarkable accuracy; he was as sharp in movement as in feature, and sometimes in voice.

"Got a job for you, George," he announced. "Right up your street."

Gideon studied the card.

"Tell you what you ought to do," said Lemaitre. "Disguise yourself as a Yank, and go and get robbed. Then you'd be able to catch the so-and-sos red-handed."

"Any particular method used?" inquired Gideon.

"Most of them get their pockets picked while dancing with hostesses," said Lemaitre. "Some of them seem to think that it's done by waiters in the restaurants. A lot of these places are jammed so tight that waiters are always pushing past. And Americans often carry their billfolds, as they call 'em, in their hip pockets."

"H'm, yes," mused Gideon. "One or two pickpockets could easily be planted among the waiters. Has Central checked all the waiters in Soho?"

He kept his rather heavy-featured face straight and his full lips set as he put the question. He sat there, massive, with big, slightly rounded shoulders. His iron-gray hair was brushed back from his high forehead.

"No, and they haven't counted all the peas in the pods, either," Lemaitre retorted. "Know how many waiters are employed in Soho during the summer, George?"

"About five or six thousand," Gideon said.

"And from all over the place, too—Cypriots, Greeks, Germans, Swiss, Italians, French—even had a couple of Egyptians in a place I went to last week. As for the Irish—"

"How serious *is* the trouble?" demanded Gideon.

"Damned serious. I told you."

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"Then we'll have to send men to every restaurant where there's been trouble. The managers must be asked about all their waiters. If it's as bad as you say, we've got to have a big checkup. Tell Central that's what I recommend and offer them man-for-man help."

"We can't afford the manpower! What with holidays and this summer flu going the round and—"

"Why not start this afternoon?" inquired Gideon. "Make the rounds yourself."

Lemaitre had been tied to the office for too long a stretch and needed a break. He might complain about being dragged from his desk work, but he would enjoy a jaunt to Soho. Except possibly for Gideon himself, no one else at the Yard knew that part of London's West End better than Lemaitre.

Gideon turned to other matters relating to London's crime. There was plenty of it; at times there seemed too much for the Yard to handle with its present force. He was not the only officer on the C.I.D. who would work overtime, but unlike the lower ranks he would not get paid for it.

When in the middle of coping with a report from the Fraud Squad, he decided to bring Kate, his wife, up to Soho for an evening so they could have dinner at one of the places where pickpockets worked, and go on to one of the good night-club spots afterward.

The thought cheered him up.

Three mornings later, Lemaitre was waiting at his desk when Gideon came in. Lemaitre was perky, if bleary-eyed.

"'Morning, George!"

"What kept you up last night?" demanded Gideon.

"Duty," declared Lemaitre virtuously. "Nothing but line of duty for me. Now I've visited seven night spots. You know, George, we get it all wrong—we shouldn't read the newspapers so much. Some of the shows are damned good. Maybe a bit too much exposure for Watch Committees, but I didn't find anything nasty."

"Perhaps the management knew you were in the audience," Gideon said. "Free drinks everywhere?"

"I wasn't there to check on the shows, I was there to get help from the managements," Lemaitre said. "If they cared to buy me a drink on the house—"

"What's the report so far?" Gideon interrupted.

"Been into it with Central," said Lemaitre, "and this is how it adds up. These seven places I visited were the ones where most of the victims of the robberies have been. Lemme put that plainer. We've taken a hundred complaints at random—"

"How many have there been altogether?"

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"Three hundred and nine."

Gideon frowned.

"And out of the h u n d r e d Americans who've lost t h e i r billfolds, ninety-three of them had been to one or the other of these seven spots," Lemaitre went on. "Seventy-one of them had been to all seven. More had been to a place called the Electra than any others."

"Do the victims usually stand at bars or sit at tables?"

"Most of them sit—especially if they're with little wifey or the girl friend or a hostess. A few stick to the bars. I've talked to a dozen of the victims and tried to find out if they can remember just when they were robbed—but they're all vague, except that it was after they'd paid the bill at one place and before they paid it at another. The pocket could have been picked while leaving one place or while on the way to another or while entering or being in the other."

"Did each man dance with a hostess?"

"Only about one in three. But that's something, George—they all danced."

"How many of the others were with their wives?"

"Another one in three."

Gideon said, "Right. Anything from the places you visited last night?"

"I've checked every waiter in six spots. None of them has a record. Had one s u r p r i s e, though—there are more English waiters than any other nationality. Wouldn't have thought t h a t, would you?"

"No," agreed Gideon. "What about the seventh spot y o u visited?"

"The Electra. They've got such a big staff, it's impossible to check everyone. That's our best bet, George."

"Hm." G i d e o n considered. "What mood are the American victims in?"

"They're all right," answered Lemaitre. "No ill feeling. Could have happened anywhere, they say. Bit of a shock to find it in England, the home of honesty as they think—funny how old-fashioned some of these overseas types are—but they're not anti-British as a result of the loss."

"How many of them would help?"

"Help?"

"How many of them would go to the Electra again and take some marked money with them?" inquired Gideon patiently. "That seems our best way of finding who's behind it."

"Why the heck didn't *I* think of that?" said Lemaitre plaintively. "I'll go and see them this morning, shall I?"

"If you take my advice, you'll drink only milk," Gideon said. "Use that invisible powder which turns green on warm fingers. By

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the way, I think I'll take Kate to the Electra tonight."

Kate Gideon, tall, slim-waisted, rather heavy-bosomed, was loving this night out. Her eyes were bright, champagne had given her a lift, and had even given George the mood to dance.

The floor at the Electra was jammed so tight that it was almost impossible to move freely, but Kate seemed to enjoy herself thoroughly.

Back at his table in a little raised alcove Gideon watched the other tables, a few of them deserted, most of them crowded. This was one of the very big night clubs, and at least 600 people were crammed into space large enough for 400. There should be a fire ordinance against this overcrowding.

He watched the American guinea pigs.

Most of them had that indefinable something which made them stand out. American voices kept sounding in comment, in request, in laughter. The foreign accents of the waiters were more subdued, but clear enough. It was like looking on an oasis of Cosmopolita in the heart of England.

Kate's feet were tapping out the rhythm of the dance band.

The band, all in white and gold, quickened its pace and the mass of dancers were caught in a kind of hysteria. They stamped, swayed, pressed close together, and the rhythm got faster and faster.

Then abruptly the music stopped.

After a pause the bandleader crooned into the microphone, "That's all for now, ladies and gentlemen—the Electra's electrifying floor show comes on right now."

Gideon watched as the crowd went, breathlessly, back to the tables.

"I'm glad we weren't dancing that one," Kate said laughingly. "I'd never have got you on the floor again all evening. Isn't it a wonderful band?"

"I don't think there's going to be much more music from that band tonight," Gideon said.

"What on earth do you mean?"

"Just watch those musicians," Gideon said.

One after another the instrumentalists glanced at their hands, then rubbed them surreptitiously inside their coat pockets, or took out a handkerchief and rubbed desperately. Green smears appeared on the white jackets and trousers. They began to talk frantically to one another.

The bandleader got up and went offstage. A second band filed on, to take over for the floor show. The first lot went off furtively, still glancing at their hands.

"What *is* the matter?" demanded Kate.

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"End of the beat for that lot," said Gideon. "Pockets were picked during that dance—the band worked everyone on the floor up to a frenzy. All the dancers were bumping into one another, so no one would notice his pocket being picked. The wallets were handed up to the band platform and passed along to the leader. But they won't get that stain off in a hurry."

"Got 'em green-handed," Lemaitre exclaimed half an hour later. "They were all in it—six of 'em. And we'll get a lot of the loot back, George. You deserve a medal for improving Anglo-American relations."

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In the never-ending battle between bank robbers and bank tellers . . .

CAUSE FOR ALARM

by JAMES HOLDING

IT IS WELL KNOWN THAT WHILE a criminal is engaged in the commission of a crime, and during the period immediately following, he is a veritable bundle of nerves. He is drawn up so tight that any trifling occurrence of an unexpected nature can send him into a blind panic, with his nerves twanging like guitar strings. And his reaction to such an event—to anything which, in his highly nervous state, seems to him to be a cause for alarm—often takes unpredictable forms. Sometimes his panic makes him more cunning, more dangerous; sometimes it has just the opposite effect.

Lieutenant Randall of the robbery detail was well aware of this basic psychological truth. He had even, in his early days as a patrolman, been its victim. A thief, emerging from a jewelry shop with considerable loot and a sweet certainty that there wasn't a cop within three blocks, was rudely startled by a sudden yell from Randall who, off duty and merely passing by, happened to spot him. As a result, Randall took a .32 caliber bullet through the calf of his right leg from a usually prudent and peaceful lawbreaker who had never before so much as raised his voice to an officer of the law. As the thief explained later in court, if he'd *known* a cop was in the vicinity he would have surrendered meekly on being challenged; but Randall had so startled him that he had instantly begun to shoot, a reflex action occasioned entirely by blind panic.

After that experience Randall believed he knew pretty well what to expect when a crook was given sudden cause for alarm. He had the scar on his leg to prove he had earned the knowledge the hard way. Yet he had acquired only half the lesson. The other half he learned from a young bank teller named Harry Oberlin.

Harry Oberlin worked at the Citizens National Bank. And it was through his teller's window that a bank robber, one day in early summer, relieved the bank of $3200.

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Randall got the call at headquarters about a half hour after noon. The bank's cashier, in the usual half-coherent state of bank officials who call the police to report a bank robbery, wasn't very helpful. "No, I don't know what he looked like or how much he stole. It happened only minutes ago. At Harry Oberlin's window—he's the one who touched the alarm. I haven't had a chance to—"

"Hold everything," Randall said sharply. "I'll be there in five minutes." He figured he could get the information more quickly on the spot than he could over the phone. He went himself.

The bank was only a block from headquarters, so Randall was as good as his word. Five minutes later, the cashier, a Mr. Dangerfield, met him at the front entrance of the bank, recognizing him as a police officer, no doubt, by the unbanking-like speed with which Randall came through the revolving door.

Leading Randall into the railed enclosure where the bank's officers sat quietly behind impressive desks, Dangerfield said, "We haven't made any fuss, of course. Our patrons don't even know there's been a robbery." He jerked a thumb at the dozen or so customers lined up before the two tellers' windows opposite.

"Where was your guard during the stickup?" Randall asked.

"In the Men's Room." There was anger in Dangerfield's tone. "I think perhaps the thief waited for that moment."

They reached Dangerfield's desk. A young man of mild appearance was waiting for them in a chair beside it. The cashier sat down behind the desk and invited Randall to have a chair. "This is Harry Oberlin," he introduced the young man. "He's the one who had the—ah—bandit at his window."

"Then you're the one I want to talk to," Randall said. "Tell me exactly what happened."

The teller cleared his throat. "This fellow came up to my open window. He was alone, nobody behind him. He handed a canvas sack through to me along with this note." Oberlin passed Randall a slip of brown wrapping paper.

It was the usual thing: THIS IS A STICKUP. EMPTY YOUR CASH DRAWER IN THIS BAG. It was printed in block letters, with a ballpoint pen.

"What did he look like?"

Oberlin shrugged. "Medium height, medium weight, white man, brown hair, maybe twenty-four or five. Gray slacks, gray windbreaker. He kept one hand inside his jacket as if he had a gun. Anyway, our cameras probably got him."

The cashier broke in, "Oberlin managed to trigger our security cameras."

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"Good," Randall said to Oberlin. "Then what?"

"I did what he said. We have standing instructions to do that, since we're insured and the bank doesn't want any of us murdered."

Mr. Dangerfield waved his hands. "Never mind that, Harry."

Randall said, "How much money was in your cash drawer?"

"About thirty-two hundred, I think. Bills and silver. I haven't had time to check the precise amount."

"Didn't anybody else notice what was going on?"

Oberlin shook his head. "I guess not. The bandit looked around the bank several times while I was filling his bag, but nobody seemed to pay any attention to him. He was plenty nervous, though."

"And after you filled his sack?"

"He took it and walked out the side door to the street and turned south. Then I hit the alarm bar to alert Mr. Dangerfield."

"And that was it, eh?" Randall had heard the story so many times before. "Disappeared in the lunch-hour crowds, I suppose?"

"Well," Oberlin said, "I followed him to the door as soon as I could get around the counter and I saw him duck into a dark-blue Plymouth sedan, 1968 model, that was parked down Ward Street, and drive off like a shot."

"For God's sake!" Randall said. "Why didn't you say so before? A dark-blue 1968 Plymouth sedan?" He reached for the telephone on the cashier's desk, then paused. His respect for Harry Oberlin was mounting. "You didn't by any chance see the car's license number?"

"Not all of it. Just the last two digits—39."

Randall got an outside line, dialed headquarters, and asked for Hennessy. "Randall," he said crisply when Hennessy came on the line. "Take a look at your Auto Theft list and see if there's a dark-blue 1968 Plymouth sedan on it with a license number ending in 39."

After a brief wait Hennessy said, "Here it is, Lieutenant. Reported stolen last night from the North Side Shopping Center. Full license number is—"

"Don't tell me," Randall interrupted, "Put it on the air. All points, urgent. I'm at Citizens National Bank. Ten minutes ago a guy robbed this place and he's using that Plymouth as a getaway car." He gave Hennessy a quick recap of the bandit's appearance, quoting Oberlin. Then he hung up.

He turned to Mr. Dangerfield. "I'm afraid he has a good start. He'll probably abandon the stolen car as soon as he's well away from this neighborhood. But we'll do what we can. I'd like to see what your camera got as soon as the film's developed, and I'll

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have this note checked for fingerprints. Meanwhile, can I get a definite figure on the amount of money actually stolen, Mr. Oberlin? Can you find that out for me now?"

"Sure," Oberlin said, and stood up.

Randall left Dangerfield sitting disconsolate at his desk and followed Oberlin to his cage. The teller pulled open his cash drawer and showed it to Randall. It was empty as a schoolhouse on Saturday morning.

"Lieutenant," said Oberlin hesitantly, "I didn't want to say anything to Mr. Dangerfield, but I was kind of prepared for this robbery."

Randall stared. "Prepared?"

"I mean, there are so many holdups of banks and savings and loan companies these days that I figured it might happen to *me* sometime, too, you know?"

Randall nodded.

"So what I did, I tried to figure out how I could kind of surprise any bandit who held me up. You know, without running too much risk of getting hurt myself."

The phone on Oberlin's counter rang. The teller picked it up and answered it. "It's for you, Lieutenant."

Randall took the phone. "Randall," he said.

"Hennessy, Lieutenant. We've picked up that Plymouth sedan of yours."

Randall couldn't believe his ears. "Already?"

"Yep." Hennessy tried to keep from sounding complacent. "Not too far from the bank. Abandoned."

"That figures. No sign of the man?"

"No sign of him." Hennessy laughed a little. "But the car wasn't empty, Lieutenant. There was a bagful of money on the front seat."

"Well, well." Randall stole a look at Oberlin. "How much?"

"No details yet, Lieutenant. Car 36 just this minute called in that they'd found the Plymouth and a sackful of money. I thought you'd want to know about it right away."

"I do. Fast work, Hennessy. And thanks." Randall hung up slowly. "Did you hear that?" he asked Harry Oberlin.

"No," said Oberlin. "You haven't caught the bandit already, have you?"

"Not quite. But we've found the money. At least some of it. He left it behind in the car."

It was Oberlin's turn to laugh. He laughed out loud and his pleasure was infectious. The teller in the adjoining cage looked over and grinned in sympathy. "You mean the robber not only abandoned his getaway car but the money, too?"

"Seems like it." Randall fixed the young teller with a stern eye.

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"Now, just before the phone rang, Oberlin, you were saying something about being prepared to surprise any bandit who might hold you up. What did you mean?"

"I guess it did surprise him!" Oberlin said. "But it must have scared the daylights out of him if he went off and left the money behind. The best part of it is"—the teller was practically chortling—"all I did was exactly what he told me to do—to put everything in my cash drawer into his bag. Including the little surprise I always kept in the drawer in case of bandits."

Randall said, "All right, Oberlin. I'm asking again. What was it?"

"A smoke bomb, Lieutenant," Oberlin said with the air of a David who has just bested a Goliath. "A smoke grenade, timed to go off three minutes after I pulled the pin. I put it in the bandit's bag with the money."

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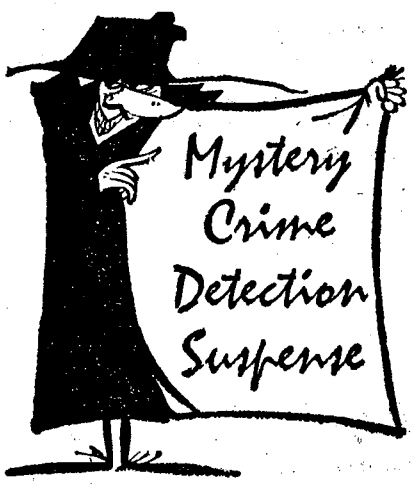

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At the time of this writing, David Ely is the author of three novels —TROT, SECONDS, *and* THE TOUR—*all of which have received considerable critical acclaim. Eric Ambler called* SECONDS *"the most original novel I have read in a long time." Eliot Fremont-Smith, reviewing for "The New York Times," rated* THE TOUR *as one of the year's outstanding novels.*

The critical acclaim was equally enthusiastic for Mr. Ely's book of short stories, TIME OUT. *One of the stories, "The Sailing Club" (reprinted in the April 1964 issue of EQMM), won the coveted Edgar awarded by Mystery Writers of America for the best mystery short story published in 1962; another story, "The Academy," was chosen by Martha Foley for her annual,* THE BEST AMERICAN SHORT STORIES, *1966.*

Mr. Ely's stories have a remarkable range: they include tales of horror and the macabre, of irony and sardonic humor, of passion and compassion, of the imaginative and the real—"all of them," to quote one discerning critic, "displaying a fine, disciplined talent directed at the inner follies of human behavior."

The David Ely story we now bring to you—"The Captain's Boar Hunt"—was not in his collection, TIME OUT; *but it was in Anthony Boucher's Honor Roll of the best mystery short stories published during 1964. When the story appeared in "The Saturday Evening Post," the Post editors wrote: "To these mountain men combat was a lark—and violence and vengeance a way of life." And that way of life was also a way of death, full of terror and gripping suspense . . .*

THE CAPTAIN'S BOAR HUNT

by DAVID ELY

AT FIRST THERE WERE FOUR of them—Muffet, Loftus, Yardley, and Burr—hard, lean men from Tennessee who could ignore the discipline of Army life because their own was stronger. Reared as hunters and woodsmen, they required no instruction to

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become infantrymen, nor did they need to be chivied into a fighting mood—the first enemy shell that landed near them was their indoctrination. They moved through gray battle days with a tireless rhythm as steady as the ancient Cumberland names they bore, and fought across the fields of France so savagely that the rest of Company B was made uncomfortable.

They sensed this discomfort and privately relished the knowledge that they were its cause. Each day of fighting seemed somehow to set them further apart from the rest, as if they were subject not to the Army but instead to something more powerful within themselves. To this way they had brought their own hard contempt for fate—a bitter inheritance, like the worn-out soil their ancestors had clung to out of a desperate pride—and in this war they had found a justification for all they had ever learned: that nature was sterile and men fought. Thus the only loyalty they honored was to one another; all else they ignored. If one of the ordinary soldiers had ever whispered his supersititous dread of the inhuman power which had snatched them up, they would have spat in derision.

Once when the company had fallen out beside a shell-gouged road, the lieutenant sauntered over to the mountain men and, with a genial smile, remarked, "Seems like you fellows are in a hell of a hurry to end the war."

They regarded him with cold eyes. "What fer?" asked Loftus. Then they looked at each other, and from somewhere within their tight little square, there rose a mirthless snicker.

Undaunted, the young lieutenant squatted down and watched them clean their rifles. Each stock bore several scratches. He had not noticed these before and asked what they were for.

"Them thar?" Yardley grinned open a row of yellow teeth. "Why, them's jest worm tracks."

Again there was a hollow snicker, and Loftus echoed "Worm tracks."

Muffet spoke through a tongue-sized tobacco wad, "These here on mah rifle, sir; them's mah birthdays, 'case ah fergit how old ah is." Once more the snicker; and the lieutenant, a proper young man from Ohio, retreated with dignity.

"I think those men are notching their kills on their rifles, sir," he told the captain later. The captain, who tempered his fear of death with brandy from the medical stores, gazed at him silently. "It's like animals, sir," the lieutenant said. Uncertainly, he added, "Isn't that what we're fighting the war against?"

The captain swore beneath his breath. "How many notches are there, Scott?" he asked.

The lieutenant looked baffled.

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"Why, sir, there must be at least thirty. Seven or eight apiece."

The captain nodded his head and then, on impulse, he limped over to the four Tennesseans and wordlessly handed them the brandy flask.

At first there were four of them. But on the day before Christmas, 1944, Joe Muffet was shot through the head by a German sniper. The others crouched at his side, gaping at the brains and blood, their outrage reflecting the dead man's grayed expression. Then a medical corpsman appeared, red-faced and puffing weary competence. "Okay, you guys," he began, stooping toward the corpse; but fierce fingers plucked a handful of his shirt, and he found his face suddenly two inches from a tabacco-stained bush of bristles.

"Don't tech him," a harsh voice whispered. "Jest ye watch him till we git back."

The corpsman was no fool. He stayed where the fingers dropped him, and within two hours the three mountain men came back to snarl him away. They buried Joe Muffet themselves on some secret hilltop (there was no man around who cared to suggest a different arrangement) and that night they were observed notching their rifle stocks with the jackknives they kept razor-sharp by honing them, so the story went, on Iron Crosses.

The three men drew even closer than before. In the last wild days of the war, they ranged off on private patrols deeper into Germany, it was said, than any other American soldiers had gone, and when the captain remarked politely that he would appreciate being informed of the results of their war, they quietly emptied the pockets of their field jackets on his bedroll. Their loot consisted of bits of cloth ripped from German uniforms—rank markings, mostly those of officers above company grade. The captain estimated that there were a good two dozen of these. When he glanced up from the pile of cloth, the men had gone. The captain, with his usual good sense, quickly burned the trophies.

Later he spoke to the first sergeant, a sad and dutiful career man. "Sergeant," he said soberly, "the day this is all over, I hope to Hannah they have the rare good judgment to fly these hillbillies home. Straight home."

The first sergeant nodded his heavy gray head. "I know what you mean, sir. They ain't soldiers and they ain't civilians, but I'll be damned if I can figure out just what they are."

"All I know," the captain said, "is that they ought to be sent home."

Soon after the war's end, the company began to disintegrate in the first round of rotations and

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discharges. Some of the old-timers departed, including the captain, but the war in Asia was not over, and so those who remained in Germany felt no overpowering urge to leave. The Russian Zone was nearby, yet in those days no one worried about that. Discipline was loose and danger gone, and for men who knew how to make the best of the humble pleasures a beaten Germany could provide, life that summer was not harsh. Even the men from Tennessee seemed to enjoy it.

In mid-July the new company commander appeared. Captain Fitch was a short, plump young man with a rosy complexion which would grow fiery red under stress. He was, first and last, a martinet. He rigidly enforced the rule against fraternization and then set about enforcing every other rule he could find in the mass of special orders that floated down from higher headquarters and were ignored by virtually everyone else.

Soon the men of Company B were the wonder and the pity of the Bavarian occupation. Captain Fitch drilled them, he inspected them, he routed them out of their bunks at unheard-of hours for forced marches with full field packs, and he was quick to restrict them to their barracks for the slightest violations of neatness, promptness or miliary courtesy.

This fanatic strictness was borne patiently by the men, who were anxious to avoid any trouble that might prolong their service. They referred to the captain as "old tomato face," among other less complimentary epithets, but moodily accepted him as one of the unpredictable visitations of a capricious providence, akin to an epidemic or a holocaust.

If Captain Fitch hoped that his severity would win the admiration of his fellow officers and particularly his superiors, he was mistaken. At the Officers' Club he was shunned as though he were leprous. The other officers were amused by him but they were also afraid that some dyspeptic general might hear of his reputation and order them all to adopt his stern methods. For themselves, they preferred to drink and play cards, and above all to hunt wild boar, the sport of gentlemen. Soon the wall above the bar at the Officers' Club was studded with boar heads, with curved tusks glittering above the bottles where their slayers could proudly survey them, until with the rounds of drinks bought in celebration, the hunters became as glassy-eyed as their prey.

Captain Fitch remained an outsider. No one invited him to join a boar hunt. No one stood him a drink at the bar. Whenever he cornered some colleague to begin an earnest discussion of some military problem set forth

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in one of the Army's beige-jacketed manuals, he felt the unvoiced hostility. So, as time passed, he spent less time at the club and more at the barracks, to the discomfort of his harried troops.

The three Tennesseans had no great difficulty under the regime of Captain Fitch. Although they did not care for drill and were gigged frequently in personal inspections, they did not seem to mind the rest of it. Forced marches they accepted; rifle practice at the range they enjoyed, and the obstacle course to them was simple exercise. Captain Fitch looked on them contemptuously as unsoldierly barbarians, but he had heard the stories of their wartime exploits, and in spite of himself was touched with envy and admiration.

On one further score the mountain men attracted his notice. They, too, hunted boar on the weekends, and although they did not bring back the heads, they had acquired a handsome collection of tusks, including several larger than any on display at the Officers' Club.

One day in early August the Tennessean named Lee Loftus asked to see the captain. In his hand he held a letter, written on a piece of ruled school paper.

"Mah wife, she's sick," he said shortly. "Ah gotta git on home."

Captain Fitch paused on the verge of a reprimand for the omission of the customary "sir." Frowning, he accepted the piece of paper for examination. On it a childish hand had printed the words, "Im sick com bakk Lottie."

"Are you requesting emergency leave, Loftus?"

"Reckon so."

"Reckon so, *sir!*" snapped the captain automatically. Then, to cover his embarrassment, he spoke more frostily than he had intended. "See here, Loftus, we can't proceed on the basis of this note. It simply says she's sick. It doesn't say how seriously—"

"Lottie wouldn't write less'n she was real bad sick." The soldier's voice had lost its nasal quality; Loftus spoke softly, but it was far from a pleading softness.

Captain Fitch stirred uneasily beneath the man's steady gaze. He noticed that the eye whites were yellowing. "In any case," he said, looking away, "the Red Cross must handle this. We'll inform the local representative to cable for an investigation and then, assuming there's the proper authorization over there—"

But Loftus had done an about-face, without saluting, and had walked stiffly out. Captain Fitch leaped up in a rage, but some preservative instinct forbade him to have the man called back at once. He waited for an hour and then dispatched the first sergeant,

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who returned to report that Loftus was gone.

"I think he may be headed up toward Frankfurt, sir, to hitch a plane ride," the first sergeant said, attempting a conciliatory smile. "These hillbillies—"

He got no further. The captain cut him off with a roar. "Then he's AWOL!" and struck the desk, his fury heightened by the sight of the first sergeant's placid features. "We've got to teach these yahoos they can't break the rules when it pleases them!" the captain shouted. "I want him arrested! *Arrested!*"

It was several days before the story of what happened at Frankfort drifted back to Company B, and even then no one was quite sure what to believe. One version had it that Loftus had carved up three M.P.s with his jackknife; another, that he had tried to commandeer a transport plane at gunpoint; and a third, that it had finally taken ten men and tear gas to subdue him. In any event, he was a prisoner, but before matters could be sorted out, it seemed, word came from Tennessee: Lottie Loftus had died. The next day the stockade guards found the body of Lee Loftus swaying from a ceiling heating pipe, strung up there by his belt.

Company B waited for some reaction from Yardley and Burr. For hours the two mountain men sat on their bunks, studying their shoe tops in thoughtful absorption—Yardley showing the edges of his yellow teeth in an odd grimacing smile, and Burr solemnly cracking his knuckles each in turn. At length the first sergeant paid them a call.

"You men mustn't think the captain was in any way at fault," he summed it up nervously. "I'm afraid your buddy just went wild, that's all. Lost his head."

Yardley did not move. He still gazed at his shoes. "Reckon so," he said softly, and Burr, without ceasing to work his knuckles, nodded. Nor did they look up when the first sergeant moved away, treading as if he were in a minefield.

"Those hillbillies gonna blow, First?" someone outside inquired.

"What you talkin' about?" the first sergeant grumbled, brushing past the group gathered there.

That night, after he had completed drafting a request to be transferred to the Pacific, he switched on his radio in time to hear the first report of the Japanese surrender—and solemnly ripped what he had written to shreds.

The celebration of V-J Day at the Officers' Club was memorable. After the assemblage had been drinking for several hours, a fat-bellied major reeled to the game room and staggered back to the bar with a handful of darts and

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a lop-sided grin. "Here's one for ol' Hirohito!" he yelled and let fly a dart at the colony of stuffed boar heads.

His enthusiasm was so infectious that the air was soon a thistle field of darts, and the sullen German bartender took refuge beneath the bar. In the midst of the game the officer of the day wandered in, also drunk, and added to the fun by drawing his pistol and blazing away at the heads. By the time the smoke had cleared away, most of the trophies had toppled onto the trembling bartender; the rest looked more like dissipated walruses than boars.

"Gotta get more boars!" the major bellowed. Some of the younger officers still able to stand proposed an immediate hunt, *en masse,* but the idea found few adherents. "Who'll go for boar?" the major cried. "Who'll hunt the wild piggy-wigs?"

The O.D. holstered his empty weapon carelessly in his shirt front. "Send Captain Fitch," he suggested. There was a roar of laughter.

"Fitch! Fitch!" All through the club the cry went up for Fitch, who was playing solitaire in the game room and sipping beer. In no time at all he was surrounded by sweating and unbuttoned officers, who gaily announced that he had been chosen to replenish the stock of heads.

"Don't be ridiculous!" He stood up with a blazing face, and his hands began to shake, although he was perhaps the only sober man in the place.

The major leaned on the card table, exhaling bourbon fumes. "Whassa matter, Fitch—you scared of a l'il pig?"

Fitch stared at the circle of smirking faces and heard a ripple of laughter. It was intolerable. He clutched his head as if it were threatening to explode, and the officers tottered back a step.

"'S okay, gents," the major declared, waving his hands, "if Fitch is scared of the piggies—" He did not finish his sentence, but fell at last, crashing face first into the card table and splitting it neatly in two. The others weaved away unconcernedly, leaving Fitch in his desperate rage, staring at the fallen major. At length he, too, departed, so swollen with fury that he appeared to float through the doorway.

For a week Captain Fitch nursed his anger in the solitude of Company B's territory. His face was now perpetually aglow, and the first sergeant, prudently deciding to postpone all but routine matters, shelved his plan to suggest that Yardley and Burr receive an immediate transfer to a rotation center near Bremerhaven.

One day the major stopped by. "I say, Fitch," he remarked, af-

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fecting a British casualness, "I seem to recall some unpleasantness up at the club the other night."

Fitch ground his teeth together. "Not at all, Major," he said.

"Well, anyway," the major continued, "I hope we can consider the matter closed. No hard feelings, eh?" He smiled unconvincingly and wiggled a half salute. "See you around."

After he had gone, Captain Fitch sat at the desk, slightly breathless, examining a pencil which had snapped between his fingers.

It was in the predawn darkness of the following morning that the first sergeant woke to hear the quick rattling coughs of an idling jeep outside. Being a dutiful man, and knowing he would not sleep if he did not investigate, he pulled his clothes on and went out to have a look. The jeep sat chuffing on the other side of a patch of close-trimmed greensward, black now under the tired light of morning stars. Three figures were beside it, loading bundles in.

The first sergeant scuffed his boots in gravel. "What's up there now?" One of the men hastened toward him. He recognized the short squat figure even before he saw the twin bars of silver on the shoulders.

"Good morning, sir," the first sergeant said, buttoning his shirt.

Captain Fitch seemed ill at ease. "Oh, there, Sergeant," he mumbled, glancing around at the square of silent barracks as though he expected to see more men come tumbling out. "I'm taking a three-day pass." He paused. "The executive officer knows, of course."

"Very good, sir."

"As a matter of fact," Fitch went on, extracting each word slowly, "I thought I'd do a bit of hunting. Boar hunting."

"Good luck, sir."

"Thank you." Fitch turned away, then spoke with a casual air. "I'd just as soon you didn't say anything about this—the hunting, I mean—until we get back." The first sergeant inclined his head. Fitch drifted a few steps away. "As for the two men with me, I've taken care of the paperwork involved."

"Thank you, sir." The first sergeant's voice cracked suddenly, and he shuddered with a quick chill prescience. "Who are they, sir?" he asked, not wanting to hear a reply.

"Yardley and Burr."

The first sergeant nodded sagely to himself there in the morning darkness. The thought of trying to stop the expedition he dismissed from his mind. He trudged slowly back to the barracks, with the jeep's hum fading in his ears.

They raced the jeep along the

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Autobahn in the last black moments before dawn, then turned onto a feeder road that twisted between regiments of trees which screened the early sun. By noon they were bumping over the cobbled street of a scrubbed village in a remote corner of the American zone.

Burr was the driver. Yardley sat with an M-1 rifle angled between his knees. Captain Fitch bounced sleepily in silence, fiddling with his carbine strap and not at all sure that the hunting trip had been a sensible idea.

"You're certain we'll get some boar?" he asked.

"We cain't miss," said Yardley.

"I'll thank you," the captain said irritably, "to address me as 'sir.' We're not civilians yet, Yardley."

In the doorway of the last cottage in the village a one-legged man leaned on crutches. As the jeep shot past, the captain thought he saw the figure raise one hand in a fist and shake it at them bitterly. His fingers tightened on the carbine; it occurred to him that he had never in his life fired a weapon at any living thing—the boars would be his first taste of combat. He smiled to himself and spoke more cheerfully.

"I suppose you just flush them out and then let them have it, eh?"

"The boars, sir?" Yardley grinned straight ahead. "It ain't quite that easy, sir. Best thing is the way we does it. We sneak up on 'em and then ol' Burr here, he clops their ears off with his knife, so they cain't hear so good, see, sir? And then it ain't no trick a-tall to git 'em, sir."

Captain Fitch supposed that this was an evidence of good fellowship, and forced a chuckle.

"'N after that we generally slips a paper bag over their heads and hauls 'em in by the tail, sir."

Captain Fitch chuckled again. He decided to remember these bits; they would garnish his hunting stories when he returned to the club with his kills.

"Leastways, sir," Yardley went on, "that's the way ol' Loftus done it." There was a pause. The jeep gunned ahead. "You recollect Private Loftus, sir?"

"Of course I do." Captain Fitch cleared his throat in annoyance. "I suppose," he said brusquely, "you know the boar country pretty well, you two?"

"Oh, yes, sir," said Yardley. "We know it right good, sir. We're goin' to a place in the woods, sir, where you won't have to worry about no boars."

"Good hunting, I hope," the captain remarked, glad that the subject of Loftus had been dropped.

"Mighty good, sir. They's goin' to be a real fine hunt this time—yes, sir!"

It was late afternoon when Burr

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turned the jeep onto a dirt road that curved out of sight into the heart of a forest. They saw no one. The villages lay far behind; the sun was dropping and the birds were still. From a distance a woodsman's ax echoed among the giant trees, but as the jeep bounced onward, even that sound dwindled behind them and then died. Soon the road narrowed into a mere trail, and then that vanished too. Still Burr guided the jeep forward, its wheels spitting pine needles and its frame trembling as though it were not sure of the path. Then they stopped.

"Reckon this is it," said Yardley.

"We walk from here?" the captain asked.

"Yessir. Till we make camp."

Straight overhead among the heavy tufted branches were quick patches of a crimson sunset sky, but in the forest it was already dark. Each man shouldered his pack and bedroll. Yardley carried the M-1, slung, and Burr, armed only with his knife, bore the captain's inflatable mattress. The captain walked behind them, conscious of the blurred emptiness of the woods and troubled by vague doubts.

"You certain this is boar country, Yardley?" he asked.

"Not right here, no sir."

"I mean, there seems to be no forage and no cover for them."

"That's right, sir. We got to hike on a ways to git to where we kin hunt."

When they stopped to camp it was absolutely dark. Captain Fitch sat uneasily on his bedroll, listening to the quiet movements of the men. Every few minutes he flicked his lighter in a pretense of relighting his pipe, just for the reassurance that it gave. At last Yardley touched a match to a small neat bundle of branches, and they had a fire.

The captain noticed that it was set in a little trench and that the needles had been carefully scraped away all around it. "I'm glad to see you're careful," he said.

In the uneven gleam of flames Yardley's teeth seemed edged with red, and his eyes reflected tiny sparks. Even his voice was altered; it had a soft, smoky quality. "That's right, sir. We goin' to be careful this hunt."

Now the captain realized that he did not like the tone of voice, the face, or the manner. Nothing was right, nothing at all, and for the first time he began to think seriously the unpleasant thoughts which had occurred to him before, but which he had dismissed as unrealistic fancies. He glanced over at Burr. The man was holding the captain's carbine.

"Uh," the captain began; but the words remained in his throat. Yardley had the rifle, Burr the only other weapon. He himself was now unarmed.

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"We goin' to be right careful . . . *sir,*" said Yardley. "Ain't that right, Burr?" Burr spat into the fire. "But 'fore we start huntin'," Yardley said, "ah'm goin' to talk about a friend we had once, name of Loftus. *Good* friend. Why, that man Loftus, he'd be settin' at the fire with us this night, 'cept for one thing—"

"What are you talking about?" the captain snapped.

"—and that one thing was he got kilt, and when a man gets kilt, why that means somebody's done the killin'."

"I'm warning you, Yardley!" The captain stared at their faces. It was some kind of stupid hillbilly joke. Surely it was a joke.

"You think jest 'cause he strung hisself up with his own belt it was his doin'? We know different. You know different. You know it was you done it, same as if you shot him. You're the one made Lee Loftus die."

"I didn't!" The captain wet his lips. His throat was tight, and he pressed one hand hard against his chest, where his heart was racing. "Don't be a fool, Yardley! Do you realize who I am? I order you to stop . . . stop at once!"

The mountain man's hands were locked on the rifle, which pointed across the flames. Above the rigid white fingers were the fire-lit grin and the staring eyes. The hard, accusing voice went on.

"Ol' Joe Muffet, he got kilt fair and square in the war, and we went out and got the man that done it, but Loftus, there warn't nothin' fair 'bout how he got kilt, and you think we ain't goin' to git the man that done that, too?"

"I didn't kill Loftus! You know I didn't kill him! I wasn't responsible!" the captain shouted. "Put down that weapon!" His voice broke.

"They's two ways to kill a man. One, you jest kill him, and th' other, you give him a chance. Loftus, he never got no chance, so ah figger maybe you don't deserve no chance neither."

"It's not fair!" the captain cried out. He coughed and gagged, and turned from side to side, looking around. But of course they were alone, and he was powerless.

"But we ain't dirt like you, so we're goin' to give you a chance."

"It's not fair," the captain said again. He tried to rise, but slipped forward on his hands and knees, almost to the fire. "It's not fair."

"We goin' to *make* it fair. We goin' to give you your chance. We ain't goin' to jest kill you. You git to use the guns."

The captain pulled himself into a crouch and pressed his head fiercely with his hands. So intense was his preoccupation with the idea of justice that he did not at first comprehend Yardley's last

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words. Then he raised his head. The two men had disappeared. Beside the fire lay both weapons, loaded. Justice!

But there were two of them—and they had their knives. Captain Fitch wriggled over to the rifle. Somewhere in the darkness there was movement. With a cry of despair he stood up and swung the M-1 toward it. "Stop this! Come out! Come out at once!" He screamed and cursed. "I don't want the guns! I don't want anything!" He whirled in the direction of another sound, perhaps an echo of his voice.

The rifle roared in his hands and leaped backward, driving its heavy butt against his hipbone. He began to sob. He had not meant to shoot. Now he had started it and they would close in on him. He lay prone, put the rifle to his shoulder, and fired rapidly into the darkness; not aiming, not even hoping, just squeezing off the rounds. When the clip sprang out, he rolled over to the carbine, loaded it, and quickly emptied it. As the last singing shot ricocheted away, he hurled the carbine clattering among the trees, and after it, the rifle.

"Empty!" he roared out at the top of his voice, standing stiff-legged with his arms spread wide. "See! See! Empty! You can't kill me now! It's not fair—it's still not fair!" Then he fell to the soft needles, sobbing until he began to vomit, and rolled over away from his mess to lie doubled-up staring into the darkness.

He lay there as they came up. They were angry with him and cursing, but he refused to move. "Kill me, then," he gasped. "Kill me." They gave him both knives and ordered him to stand and fight, but he flung the knives away. "I won't! You can't make me!" Curses did not move him, nor did kicks. He would not accept their justice.

For hours, it seemed, he lay defiantly on his back, heaving with sobs and sickness, but vaguely conscious that he had won some kind of victory. They could not let him live, but neither would they murder him.

He could not quite hear all their whispered words. "We done give him a chance . . ." It was the higher, sharper voice: Yardley's. More mumbling.

Then, "Easy. We jest slip him over and they'll take care o' the rest. Ain't no risk fer us. You wanta be a deserter rest yore life?"

The captain muttered over and over again, "You can't just kill me." One of them leaned over him, spitting contempt. "You can't just kill me," the captain repeated.

A hard hand pulled him to his

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feet and shook him to the rhythm of soft words. "Mebbe *we* cain't, but someone else kin."

The breath was sour with death delayed and curdled. "Someone else—sir."

It could have been noon; the forest was sunk in itself so deeply that sunlight would never have found them. Even when they reached clearer ground, the branches of darkness hung over them and hid the sky. The captain stumbled, but behind him the hand that gripped his belt wrenched him upright and drove him on.

"Y'ever been in combat, sir? By God, no y'ain't, ah done fergot, sir. Ol' Loftus, he was a combat soldier an' he know'd what it was like. Me, mah idee is that a man who calls hisself a soldier oughta have a little combat duty 'fore he goes, sir. Else—why, else he ain't done soldierin', seems t'me, sir. Loftus done had it, sir. Don't reckon you're no different, sir."

Captain Fitch whimpered away from the cold voice near his ear. "I don't want combat. I won't fight—I won't. Not fair."

The voice laughed. "You done had yore chance, sir. Combat, hit don't care if a man fights or not. Hit comes anyhow."

Up ahead Burr stopped. Together the two men lifted the captain over something that raked his boots and scratched sharply through his trouser legs to the skin. He squealed once in fright, and then again when a match leaped to light six inches from his eyes.

"Lordy, don't he look like a li'l ol' scairt pig, Burr? See them fat cheeks on him, see them fat pink cheeks? By God, he's a li'l ol' pink pig. But he ain't no boar, no sir. He's a tame pig, he is."

Fitch lowered his head to avoid the match glare and looked behind him. The thing that had bitten him was a strand of barbed wire, and crouched beside it was the figure of Burr, also holding a match and scanning a sign brightly lettered in unweathered red paint. But the match guttered out before Fitch could read the words.

In file they trudged across the slopes and curves of brushy earth that was pocked and pitted with holes. The holes reached for the captain's feet, but the hand always shoved him staggering aside. He cried out once, "It's a battlefield!" but Yardley merely laughed.

A mile or so farther, they bellied under another fence. The captain tasted raw dirt. He pawed for grass, but there was none; only the barbed-wire fence and cleared, hard-packed dirt, and soon, another fence. He turned to clutch at Yardley, but was spun around again.

Something broke the infinite invisible lines that formed the

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darkness. Not trees, but buildings. A cluster of squares carelessly strewn in the undulating barrenness, like adobe huts blown from a cliff. Yardley hustled him roughly inside the first. It smelled of sweating stone.

"What's—"

But the rough hand thrust a wadded handkerchief into his mouth, and it was bound hard there by another one, knotted behind his head. "Combat!" Yardley said, and they tied his hands and feet up tightly with rope. "It's near dawn now, sir—you ain't got long to wait. 'Bout three hours, more or less."

The captain struggled, but only twitched on the muddied floor. And then they were gone.

The two men crouched in the brush on the other side of the first barbed-wire fence, watching the sun inch up above the rolling curve of pitted earth they faced.

"Ah don' much like it," Burr said.

Yardley spat. "Best goddern way they is," he said.

" 'Spose they gits thar 'fore we do and sees the rope?"

"They won't. Anyhow, ain't goin' to be much lef' for them to find."

Burr scratched beneath his arms. "We shoulda kilt him thar in the woods, Bud."

"Don't be a goddern fool! 'Spose we'd a done that, then what? Hide out in the woods rest our lives?" Yardley gnawed at his knuckles. "This way, they ain't goin' to be no questions ast—leastways they ain't goin' to be able to do nothin' 'bout it. They all know he ain't got sense. Hell, they'll reckon he done strayed plumb into it!"

"If we gits to him first, you mean."

"Don't you fret." Yardley glanced up at the sun. "It's nigh onto nine. They'll start up purty soon."

The ground moved twice. Something deep within it seemed to split; then the two split parts slammed violently together. For half an hour the heavy rhythms shook the earth. Then the air was still.

The two men slipped through the fence and past the red-lettered sign. Running bent low, they crossed the torn earth in the direction they had walked before.

They found the concrete blockhouses wrapped in smoke, with new holes gaping.

"He's gone!"

The first hut steamed in smoke. Through the vent of a half-shivered wall the sunlight melted in the drifting haze inside—but the place was empty. They rushed from hut to hut.

"Thar—on the hill!"

Two hundred yards away a tiny black figure without arms was leaping on wild awkward legs.

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"We gotta git him." Yardley plunged forward, as quick as the knife he drew.

"God! His arms done been blowed off!"

Yardley did not falter. "No, they ain't—he's still tied up. Jes his legs is free."

With long loping strides the two men raced after the stumbling figure. Once it paused and turned. A high-pitched laugh floated back to them across the field.

It was not an even race, for the pursuers were far faster. They closed the gap to one hundred and fifty yards, then to one hundred. They skirted the larger holes and leaped across the smaller ones, running desperately, as though they feared that by entrusting to an outside force the administration of their harsh verdict, they had made an irretrievable mistake.

And so they had, for in their haste they forgot what they had been careful to note earlier, and the blind impersonal fate which had already taken Muffet and Loftus reached out and took them.

Back at the first wire fence, the artillery-range sign had warned that the howitzers commenced firing at 0900 hours. It also bore the phrase MORTARS—0945. The first pattern of bursts enveloped Yardley and Burr together, and the same inspecting gun crew that came upon the babbling shell-shocked captain found all that was left of them.

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a *NEW* detective story by

ROBERT McNEAR

In his letter accompanying the original manuscript of "Detection Without Tears," Robert McNear told us that for a long time he has wanted to write what he called "a sort of slightly old-fashioned comedy mystery story." Well, we firmly believe that even if he tried—even if he tried as hard as he could—Mr. McNear simply could not write an "old-fashioned" story. There is something in Mr. McNear's style, attitude, viewpoint, tone, something in his literary wavelength, that is essentially now-ish, new-fashioned—something satirically contemporary, ironically current, spoofingly modern, something Absurdly (with a capital A) today-ish . . .

DETECTION WITHOUT TEARS

by ROBERT McNEAR

"ADORE YOUR CLEFT CHIN, your shaggy eyebrows," Barbara said.

A foghorn bellowed, fell silent, and he said, "That was the double diaphone on the Golden Gate Bridge. One horn points this way, one seaward. Did I tell you I'm an expert on foghorns?"

"No, you didn't," she replied. "Now, let me tell you something. Aunt Emma's hired a private detective."

"You're serious?"

"Perfectly. A private detective to learn everything in the whole world about you"—and with a dozen dainty pulls and pats Barbara made a neat little fan out of his cowlick. "Everything there is to know about Paul Robinson."

"When does this guy start?"

"Monday."

"Gives us only two days," Paul said. Then with a show of ill humor he scattered the scatter pillows from the couch, and after a while he went over to the refrigerator and opened a jar of pickled papaya. He chewed a

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piece of the tropical fruit. "Want one?"

"Love one."

He walked back to the couch where she lay on her back in fetching disarray—long legs raised slightly at the knees, hands folded on stomach, sleepy *café au lait* eyes, tousled amber hair. Removing a papaya segment from the jar he lowered it to her mouth, which opened. He dropped it in.

"Delicious," she said.

"Bought the papaya in Chinatown on sale." He was putting on his bathrobe. "Let's go out on the porch."

"In that fog?"

He picked up his raincoat from the coffee table and held it open for her, and she responded by standing up, backing into the coat, buttoning it in front, and saying, "Nothing more clammy than a clammy raincoat. Bring the papaya." And going out on the porch they passed the tasty snack back and forth as they sat on canvas deck chairs in the fog, side by side, looking straight ahead at nothing, like people from Edward Hopper.

"Barbara, tell me about the detective."

"Really, Paul, this stuff's too much. Mind if I eat the last one?"

"Feel free."

"Really too much. About the detective—but first you must understand about Granddaddy and Granddaddy's will."

"Proceed."

"Granddaddy came to California during the gold rush, but instead of being hot for gold, like other people, he was hot for grain. So he grew grain, and more grain, and more until he was so huge in grain that nobody could believe it." She popped the last papaya segment into her mouth. "And when he died he was so huge that the four corners of his ranch were Fresno, Bakersfield, Coalinga, and Los Banos, which made it larger than Maine and by far the most big-time ranch anyone ever heard of"—and she gave Paul the empty papaya jar.

"And now all that oil," Paul said.

She nodded. "One of the world's largest oil companies gets all its oil there. They wouldn't have one single gas station if it wasn't for the ranch."

"You may be the biggest heiress of all time."

"I may very well be the biggest heiress of all time."

"Go on."

"Granddaddy's will is a complicated thing. To make a long story short, most of the ranch has been in trust for me since Mommy and Daddy were killed in that plane crash. Now, about getting married."

"I'm all ears."

"My husband must be of good moral character or I don't get income from the ranch during

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marriage, and the judge of his character will be Aunt Emma and three little men from the bank"—and she mentioned San Francisco's most prestigious financial institution.

"Aunt Emma and three bankers," he said. "They have to be unanimous?"

"Unanimous. And this morning walking downstairs—I told Aunt Emma last night that we were going to get married—she was on the phone calling every private detective in the phone book. Could hear her through the door."

"She wants to put every detective in town on me?"

"No, just one. You see, Aunt Emma's got pots of money, but she's a big tightwad. She called all the detectives in the phone book and asked how much they charged. Then she hired the cheapest. Twenty dollars a day."

"His name?"

"Couldn't catch it through the door. Degrading enough, Paul, to have a detective snooping around, but to have the cheapest detective! I know how mortified you must be."

"But you didn't hear his name?"

"Told you. Couldn't through the door. But what difference does it make?"

"Just curious." He peered into the empty pickled-papaya jar. "What have you told Aunt Emma about me?"

"The truth. What you told me. Born in Indiana, that you're thirty-five years old, went to divinity school, own a religious bookstore, never been married, and are an active Republican."

"And she doesn't believe this?"

"Haven't the faintest idea what she believes, and I don't even know if she's personally concerned about me marrying a fortune hunter. She's been married to three herself. But there's the matter of the will and the three little men at the bank. Monday the detective starts following you around, and that means following us around. At the same time he digs into your background. On next Friday he reports to Aunt Emma."

Paul turned and looked south into the fog at a fluttering rumble. "The single-toned diaphragm of Alcatraz," he said, and he led Barbara back inside the apartment. "My background can stand the most intense scrutiny. My life's an open book. And I can still see you."

She returned the raincoat to the coffee table. "So you can, but not the way you usually see me," she said, and she lay down on the couch.

He joined her. "Perhaps Monday we'll lunch together at the St. Francis."

She was fanning his cowlick again. "Over dessert we'll hold hands."

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"Just briefly. Then Tuesday we'll take in the Palace of the Legion of Honour. See the art and then picnic on the grass."

"And you kiss me once on the cheek."

"Maybe twice."

So they planned the week's excursions with the private eye in mind, and when they were finished they had a schedule designed to bore the detective, impress Aunt Emma, and convince the three little men at the bank. Then, flushed with their ingenuity, they sat up on the couch and devoured another jar of pickled-papaya segments.

Barbara was standing in the doorway. "Can't tell you how nauseated I am about the detective. The cheapest one in town. Of all the nerve!"

After she left the apartment Paul had a vision . . . A flat valley. Disturbed only by changes of season, it stretched off forever through time until a man came along behind a horse, plowing in a straight line, watching the earth furrow with his *café au lait* eyes. Then other men came. They built derricks. Now the flat valley was filled with derricks.

The vision inspired him so much that he got a mild case of goose pimples, and he reached for the telephone directory which told him that 37 private detectives detected one thing or another in San Francisco. So phoning alphabetically down the list he asked each his rate. Most of them charged $50 a day, although one, a Whitney Cornelius, informed him in haughty tones that his fee was $200 a day. Paul mumbled no thanks and continued down the page until he had phoned them all.

Then he went back and recalled a Winston Faulkner, who charged $20 a day and was the cheapest private detective in San Francisco.

"You are Winston Faulkner?" Paul said later that afternoon as he entered a shabby office in North Beach.

"It depends," replied the sensitive-looking man with the wispy goatee.

Paul ignored the ambiguity and pointed to framed diplomas on the wall. "And those are your credentials?"

"My credentials. A B.A. from Stanford, M.A. from Columbia, Ph.D. from Harvard."

"But these are all English degrees awarded to a Somerville Maugham."

"Somerville Maugham is my *nom de plume*. I'm a novelist."

"A published novelist?"

"My first novel is not yet finished. I've only completed the first two thousand pages."

"But you are a detective?"

"Under my real name, but only to keep body and soul together. At heart I'm a novelist."

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"We all have at least one novel in us," Paul said, "but not necessarily two thousand pages plus"—and he put his feet up on the battered desk. "However, this is beside the point. I'm interested in you as a detective, Mr. Maugham."

"You mean Faulkner."

"I guess I do. Now, my name's Paul Robinson. I venture that has some significance for you?"

"Indeed it does."

"And next week you'll sit here and work on your novel. On Friday I'll give you a report on me to sign. For this I will pay you twenty dollars a day. That makes a total of forty, which puts you well up on the detectives' pay scale, although nowhere near the two hundred a day of someone named Whitney Cornelius I talked to."

"Whitney Cornelius is the most expensive private detective in San Francisco."

"Well, will you do it?"

"Yes and no. Yes, I will sit here next week. No, I will not work on my novel. I'll do the report on you. Writing short fiction should be a good creative exercise."

"I'm sure it will," Paul said with relief, and he began writing down items on a piece of paper such as: Tuesday visit Palace of the Legion of Honour and later picnic on grass—two kisses on cheek. "This week's itinerary," he said, and then went on to list the highlights of his personal background—born in Indiana, and so on. "On my life history to date you must work within this framework, but in writing your report you may exercise poetic license, Mr. Faulkner."

"You mean Maugham."

"Yes, Maugham. But it must have the authentic ring of a professional detective, Mr. Maugham."

"Faulkner."

Paul got to his feet. "Needless to say, the report must be ready by Friday."

"Don't you think I bear a striking resemblance to H.D. Lawrence?" asked Winston Faulkner/Somerville Maugham, as he fingered his goatee.

The same the whole world over—a girl in love is a girl in love, whether she be dirt poor, moderately comfortable, an ordinary heiress, or something more spectacular: she craves privacy with the object of her affection. And all that week the biggest heiress of all time thought that they were being followed, and she told Paul that she found the imposed *cordon sanitaire* irking—an absolute pain.

For the sake of appearances, obviously, Paul went along with the gag, although he knew that the shadowing detective was not only a figment of Barbara's

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imagination but actually was in his office working on short fiction. Paul found the whole week a big bore. The endless trips to restaurants and theaters, the countless visits to scenic and cultural attractions reminded him of the antiseptic wanderings of the young couple in the color travelogues who always start with the shiny jet plane taxiing up to the airport.

On Friday they lunched at Trader Vic's ("is he still following us," Barbara asked, "or is he working on his report?") Giddy with gaiety, crowing with cockiness, they faced each other from peacock chairs, and after dispatching limestone lettuce and abalone they separated to await developments.

At five that afternoon there was a knock on Paul's door and he admitted Barbara, luscious in tan polo coat, white wool suit, dangling gold charm bracelet, and red shoes; and her aunt, who turned out to be a surprisingly youthful apparition in Camp: figure curved and firm as that sunny navel orange from the West, a snug Pucci gown the color of the widely promoted tomato soup, skin without wrinkles and smooth in the manner of the high-priced spread, eyes clear and blue as the friendly skies of a well-known airline. Only gray hair, reminiscent of pampered steel wool, denied her a place in the generation made famous by the soft-drink bottler.

"I'm Barbara's Aunt Emma," she announced, and her voice had the smugness of one who has looked inside a living person's stomach. She sat down on the couch. "My, what a small apartment."

"My darling," Barbara said, and she kissed him on the cheek. "Aunt Emma's hired a private detective and he and three little men from the bank are coming over here. Paul, it's all got to do with Granddaddy's will."

"Your Granddaddy's will?"

A flurry of knocking came from the front door—light, furtive tapping low down, as if a scattering of siblings wanted in.

"Must be the little men from the bank," Barbara said.

Little was an understatement: They were tiny with the Vice-President of the Trust Department being the tiniest, the Executive Vice-President being plain tiny, and the President, appropriately enough, being the least tiny of all. So there was method in their minuteness, as it were, and after introductions Paul led them to the porch, for his modest apartment was now very crowded, where the President of the bank stood in the doorway and his subordinates took positions on the porch.

"Where's my private detective?" Aunt Emma demanded; and she tapped her foot.

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As if on cue, a knock sounded at the door. It was Winston Faulkner — or Somerville Maugham—the cheapest private detective in San Francisco. In a businesslike manner he shook Aunt Emma's hand, introduced himself to the others, then proceeded to extract from a manila envelope a neatly paper-clipped, double-spaced, three-thousand-word report.

"You may start," Aunt Emma said, "with Mr. Robinson's personal background."

"I shall start at the beginning," he replied, "with Mr. Robinson's birth," and he cleared his throat, or rather doubly so, Hummmppphh—humph. He began.

"Besmeared by winter's fallout from nigrescent Indiana skies, the simple country doctor rode into the night with blusterous winds stabbing at his greatcoat, horizontally flying snow rioting around his frigid face. Bending low over his frozen stead's neck, he urged the shivering animal forward through the hoarfrosted cornstalks until ahead of him in the tempestuous storm he discerned a dilapidated farmhouse. And as he dismounted he heard from the bowels of the scruffy building the clarion call that is the anchovy-stuffed olive in the martini of creation—the ageless cry of a woman in labor."

"Somewhat overwritten," Paul remarked, "but it does capture the spirit of my birth—at least, as far as I remember it."

"Humble beginnings thrill me so," Aunt Emma gushed.

"My dear Paul," Barbara said, and her smile spoke compassion. "Born in a dilapidated farmhouse."

"A dilapidated farmhouse," said the President of the bank, "is the traditional American beginning. Our bank approves of the traditional American beginning."

Fog had nuzzled up to the windows, and the other two bankers on the porch were now invisible. However, their voices could be heard clearly.

"And may we point out," said the Executive Vice-President, "that our bank always stands ready and able to make improvement loans on dilapidated farmhouse."

"We call them Friendly Traditional American Beginning Fix-Up Loans," added the Vice-President of the Trust Department.

"All right, gentlemen," Paul said to the bankers. "Now, Mr. Faulkner, I know your entire report will make for good listening, but perhaps you could skip along to your concluding paragraph. You do have a concluding paragraph?"

"I do. Hummmppphh—humph. Keeping in mind his unpretentious prairie origins three and a half decades ago, considering his

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scholarship at divinity school that was marked with fervency never before witnessed in religious education, and taking into account his present status as an absolutely celibate religious bookstore proprietor, who, at the same time, contributes mightily to the cause of the peerless Republican party; from all this I can only surmise—nay, conclude with certainty—that Paul Robinson will some day take his rightful place as Republican chaplain of that august body, the Senate of these United States of America."

Paul stood in the middle of the room, head bowed in becoming modesty.

"My darling," Barbara beamed. "We should have the marriage service immediately before he flies off to heaven," Aunt Emma said, not at all facetiously.

"Our bank fully approves of you as Republican chaplain of the United States Senate," said the President of the bank. "But we urge you to use your influence in favor of sound fiscal policies."

"Our bank has not always approved of the United States Senate," said the Executive Vice-President. "Especially during this century."

"And particularly," added the Vice-President of the Trust Department, "since Franklin Delano Roosevelt and those New Deal scoundrels."

"Gentlemen, you may count on me," said the prospective chaplain. This assurance was punctuated by a knock on the door, and muttering something about expecting a rush order of bibles, Paul opened the door.

The newcomer had a benignly craggy face, a kind of Mt. Rushmore mixed grill, but it was his clothes that gave him away. Trench-coated by Abercrombie & Fitch, suited by Brooks Brothers, tied by Sulka, booted by Peel, he was without doubt and without question the most expensive private detective in San Francisco.

"Who are you?" Paul asked, although in his heart he knew.

"Name's Whitney Cornelius and my usual fee is two hundred dollars a day."

"Who hired you?"

"Plus expenses," and he bent low and kissed Barbara's hand. "Charming to meet you again, my dear."

"Mr. Cornelius, lovely to see you again."

"Barbara," Paul said, "did you, did you—?"

"Yes, Paul, because I thought you were a little too human for all that marvelous religious background you told me about. And you seemed awfully curious about who Aunt Emma's detective was, almost as if you wanted to get in touch with him yourself."

Aunt Emma opened her mouth to speak. And this was remarkable—not because she was

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going to say something, but because she was about to talk for the first time since the arrival of Whitney Cornelius, thus breaking the most prolonged verbal silence of her talkative life. But now she spoke.

"Ridiculous waste of perfectly good money to hire *that* detective"—and she threw Whitney Cornelius a sour look—"when I've already hired *that* detective," and she beamed at Winston Faulkner/Somerville Maugham.

"Perhaps I may explain," Whitney Cornelius said, and his eyes fell on the cheapest private detective in town, in whose presence he obviously felt ill at ease. "Mr. Faulkner is the cheapest detective in town because he is not a very good detective. Actually, he is primarily an unpublished novelist who writes under the pen name, as I understand it, of Ellery Waugh—"

"Somerville Maugham," said Winston Faulkner.

"Furthermore," continued Whitney Cornelius, "my competitor has his price. He can be bought. I gather he has just read his report, and by the looks on your faces it was favorable. He was bought, as you shall see."

"Just as I suspected," Barbara said. "Mr. Cornelius, why don't you just read us your concluding paragraph. You do have a concluding paragraph?"

"I do, indeed," he answered, and from a slender pigskin attaché case he took out a handsome blue-leather folder. On the cover embossed in gold lettering was the legend: CAPER 1407. He flipped through to the last page.

"I really ought to get down to the bookstore," Paul said.

Whitney Cornelius read. "It is difficult to single out the most contemptible action of Mr. Paul Robinson's life to date. However, we must look with high disfavor on his ownership of a much raided pornographic bookstore."

The shocked silence in the room was broken by a particularly loud and tremulous blast.

"That was the single diaphragm on Yerba Buena," Paul said, trying to change the subject.

"Not to mention," continued the elegant sleuth, "his participation in the extreme New Left."

"These are star-chamber proceedings," Paul shouted. "I demand the right to face my accusers."

Whitney Cornelius gave the blue folder to Barbara. "I'd rather not continue in mixed company, but it's all there—the bank robberies, the bigamies, the burglaries, the bankruptcies, the blasphemies—the whole sordid mess."

The reactions were various.

The President of the bank moved into the fog to confer with his associates, and from the mist came the chatter of small voices.

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Aunt Emma whipped out lorgnettes through which she viewed Paul as if he were a roach spotted in her opera box.

"Mr. Robinson," asked Somerville Maugham, "how did you like my bit about besmeared by winter's fallout from nigrescent Indiana skies?"

And Barbara clutched the blue folder in her right hand as she stepped up to her discredited suitor, who noticed that the color of her eyes had gone from *café au lait* to something approximating very strong *café espresso.*

"You—you—"—and after using a word not normally associated with heiresses she twice swung the folder with such force that the legend CAPER 1407 was clearly imprinted on both of Paul's cheeks. And then for good measure she banged him once over the head, thus messing his part and squashing his cowlick.

The exodus was immediate and general except for Aunt Emma, who remained on the couch and watched Paul rummage around in the refrigerator.

"Well, Paul, you've certainly been a naughty boy."

"None of us is perfect."

"True, but you seem to be less perfect than most."

"Care for some pickled papaya?"

"Yes, how nice. You know, dear boy, you are not without charm"—and she nibbled on a segment of the tropical fruit. "Your cleft chin, your shaggy eyebrows—this papaya is delightful. Where did you get it?"

"In Chinatown on sale."

"Of course, marrying you would be out of the question. Among other things, I would be asked to resign from the Burlingame Country Club."

"Got another jar in the refrigerator."

"But although I'm known to be thrifty, dear boy, I can be very generous to my escorts."

"Can always pop over to Chinatown and get more."

Suddenly the fog was peppered with a melodious, tri-noted sound that echoed and re-echoed around the hills and harbor.

"What was that, dear boy?"

"The triple-toned diaphragm from Lime Point."

And outside on Lombard Street in the fog, facing each other in the semi-transparency, awash in the compressed air musicale from Lime Point, Barbara and Whitney Cornelius gazed into each other's eyes; and there passed between them a spark, a mystique, a flick of ozone in the cosmos, and they knew that they would see Carcassonne together before they died.

And what could be more propitious than union between the most expensive private detective in San Francisco and the biggest heiress of all time?

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 340th "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . an unusual "first," with sharp, telling details of a fleabag hotel in Skid Row, and especially of a lonesome wino who finds himself in a perilous struggle with such adversaries as Albino, Big Ears, and the Man with the Notched Nose. First-class Woolrichian suspense and atmosphere in a first-class "first" . . .

The author, Leonard F. West, was born and raised in Milton, Florida, a small town in the Florida Panhandle (and his first story is about panhandlers!) about 25 miles east of Pensacola. He spent ten years in the Air Force, traveling extensively. For the past ten years he has lived in a suburb of Denver, employed at the time of this writing as a buyer for an automotive electrical parts distributor. Writing has been Mr. West's only hobby (although occasionally he is a "brilliant armchair quarterback" when one of his favorite professional football teams is on TV). He and his wife—his biggest booster in his writing—are "currently trying to bridge the generation gap with two girls and two boys."

Mr. West sold his first story, "Not the Same Without Charlie," in his 40th year. So, for Mr. West, "Life Begins at 40," and if his first story is any evidence, he has the potential of a new bright career ahead of him . . .

NOT THE SAME WITHOUT CHARLIE

by LEONARD F. WEST

SCOBEY SAT ACROSS THE DESK from Detective Julian and felt the sweat run down the sides of his face. He wouldn't be here if he'd just stayed in the Mission, but that bottle of wine in Charlie Blue's hand had been too tempting. And now Charlie Blue was

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dead and Scobey was beginning to shake inside again and Detective Julian didn't believe a word Scobey was saying.

"Go over it again, Scobey," Julian said patiently, his tired voice reflecting his disbelief.

Scobey wiped the sweat from his face, then wiped his hands on his faded dungarees.

"Well, I was standing just inside the Mission. It was a dark—"

"Not that part," Julian interrupted. "Tell me about the package again, and the man who gave it to Charlie Blue."

Scobey looked around the room. He had been inside police stations before, but never in such a serious situation. This was homicide. This time he wasn't being booked on a drunk charge.

"Well, Charlie says he was standing outside the Three Star Bar trying to make a score. He needed just one more quarter to buy a fifth, when this well-dressed man walks up to him. Charlie tried to touch him, and damned if he don't hire Charlie right on the spot to do this job for him.

"He told Charlie to rent a room in the Barcom Hotel where he could see the street. At nine o'clock a black limousine would drive up the street, heading north. When Charlie saw it he was to go down and stand in the doorway of the hotel. The man would turn the car around and come back and park in front of the hotel. Charlie would come out, walk up to the car, just like he was bumming. The man would call him by his name and then give him an envelope.

"Then Charlie was to give him the package, but not until he heard his own name. He was to go back to the room and wait there until this first guy came by and took the envelope. He got fifty dollars to start with and fifty more when it was all done.

"Well, Charlie went and rented one of the front rooms in the hotel. It's a double and he came looking for me after the guy okayed the setup. The man told him to stay sober, but Charlie didn't think he meant not to have a couple of drinks of wine with a friend."

Julian shook his head. "Why didn't the man do all this himself?"

"He told Charlie it was a personal thing and it would ruin him if he was recognized. Charlie wasn't to open the package or anything like that, but it wasn't supposed to be anything but some private papers or something like that."

"And you and Charlie weren't suspicious?"

Scobey looked down at his ragged army field jacket and the holes in his shoes. "When you're like me and Charlie, you take what you can get without asking

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too many questions."

Julian was a tall tired-looking man with a long face and it looked even longer when he stood up and walked around the desk toward Scobey.

"What did this mysterious stranger look like?"

"Well, he was tall, like you. It was dark and Charlie didn't see him too good, but he did see a notch cut right into this guy's left nostril, right near the tip of the nose."

Julian raised his eyebrows. "Scobey, I think your partner was pulling your leg."

Scobey shrugged. "I saw the package and the fifty the guy gave Charlie, or what was left of it. Me and Charlie Blue's been bumming together for four years now. He even rented that room for a week so we wouldn't have to stay in the Mission."

Scobey could smell the wetness of his old clothes and he wanted out, even if it was still raining.

"The package and the money were both gone when we got the body."

"He had 'em when he left the room."

Scobey lied. The money was in his own pocket. The cops would want it if they knew he had it, and besides, Charlie Blue would want him to have what was left. He had scooped it off the dresser top before he came down here.

"Was Charlie Blue good at making up stories like this?"

"Charlie never lied to me before."

Julian massaged the tired pouches under his eyes. "Maybe Scobey did make a score. Maybe there was a well-dressed man down there on Skid Row, but maybe the guy was just looking for a relative or friend that had fallen off the wagon. That happens. Charlie could have rifled his car and came up with his wallet, maybe, and the package. Would he tell you if that was what really happened?"

"Charlie wasn't that kind. We'd bum, but we never stole." Scobey wiped a drop of sweat from the tip of his nose and felt his guts grind. He thought of the almost full bottle of wine in his room.

"Scobey, there's an average of one killing a month down on Barcom Street. There's usually a dozen or so assaults and somebody like Charlie Blue getting rolled for his money. Usually the victims of these assaults live, but Charlie Blue didn't. You said yourself he broke a twenty in the liquor store to buy another bottle of wine. Somebody just saw him flash the twenty and then waited to jump him when he was alone."

"What about the package?"

"What about it? What was in it? Did you and Charlie open it?"

Scobey shook his head.

"You said it was the size of

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a shoebox. Suppose Charlie had opened it and there had been just a pair of shoes inside? Would you believe him?"

"I guess so." Scobey fidgeted on the edge of the chair.

"Charlie had to make his story good. He didn't want to open the box. He didn't want you to know he was a thief."

"Charlie never lied to me, I tell you."

"This time he had to. What man in his right mind would trust an important package to a Skid Row bum?" Julian motioned Scobey to his feet. "You believe what Charlie Blue said if you want to, but don't spread it around. People will laugh at you. He was stabbed by some Skid Row bum like himself for the money he'd been waving around. The package was an extra reward to the one that killed Charlie."

Scobey was glad to stand up.

"What about the man with the notch in his nose?"

"What about him? All we have is your story, but we've got an eyewitness who saw two bums scuffling with Charlie Blue."

Scobey sagged a little.

"The witness's name is Dudley and he runs the hotel where you're staying."

The rain was a fine, steady drizzle. It was a good twenty blocks back to the hotel on Barcom Street, and Scobey merely turned up the collar of his field jacket and started walking. He hadn't expected a ride back and he didn't get one.

It was past midnight when Scobey got back to Skid Row. A few of the bars were still open, but he didn't feel like company. Charlie Blue was the only company he wanted, and Charlie wouldn't be coming back. Only when he saw the single naked bulb marking the entrance to the hotel did his step quicken. Water ran down the bridge of his nose and dripped off on his jacket. His shoes made a mushy sound as he walked, but Scobey paid these things little notice.

Charlie's body had fallen right inside the doorway to the two-story hotel and Scobey stepped around the spot and went on up. The door at the top of the stairs was closed, and he opened it quietly to avoid making noise. Then he turned right and tiptoed to the room on the left of the hallway in the front.

The room seemed strangely vacant, Scobey thought, after he downed a huge drink of the Tokay wine. He really liked White Port better, but he drank Tokay because that's what Charlie liked the best. He sat on the old army cot and looked around. Charlie's bunk was under the window and it was going to seem funny, waking up and not finding him there.

Life would be different now. Charlie could always get that last

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quarter needed for a bottle, or find a job when work was scarce. He knew all the warm places to sleep in the winter when they didn't have 50 cents for a flophouse.

Scobey stripped off his wet clothes and spread them to dry on the back of the single chair and on the end of the empty cot. He counted the money Charlie had left and it came to $33.08; then he dropped it in the pillowcase and shook it down into the corner. The clock on the front of the all-night café across the street showed one o'clock. He really didn't want to stay here, not after what had happened, but he had no other place to go.

Scobey drank the wine carefully, saving something for the morning, before he slid under the blanket on the thin lumpy mattress. He remembered the time he and Charlie Blue had rented a room in one of the best hotels in Dallas and how comfortable the beds had been.

Scobey couldn't understand Detective Julian. If he had known Charlie Blue, he would know that Charlie had been telling the truth. If anybody would lie, it would be Dudley who ran the hotel. Anybody who'd sell a bottle of 75-cent wine for $2.50 would do almost anything. Scobey hated to leave a dry room that was paid up for six more days, but tomorrow he'd leave. Things wouldn't be the same without Charlie . . .

The hand shaking his shoulder woke him. Scobey didn't struggle, just staying prone and silent, his heart jumping all over his body. His eyes were open, though, and he saw the dim figure leaning over him.

"Don't panic. I won't hurt you." The voice was quiet, husky.

Scobey didn't move a muscle. The light from the café threw a little illumination into the room, but not enough to see the visitor's face plainly.

"Your partner, where is he?" His visitor began prowling the room.

"He's dead. Somebody stabbed him."

"I saw them take him away in the ambulance. Where is the package I gave him?"

"Whoever killed him must have took it."

Scobey's stomach began churning and the sweat had started again. He moved his hand slowly and let it drift off the side of the bed toward the wine bottle. The man stopped his searching and watched intently as Scobey raised the bottle; then the man went back to his search as the wine gurgled down Scobey's throat.

"The men who killed your friend didn't get the package. It must be in this room somewhere."

The visitor bent over Charlie's bed and began ripping it apart.

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Just as he rose, his face was caught fully in the light from the café. The way his head was cocked outlined the little notch in his nostril.

"I didn't mean for your partner to get hurt. I didn't think there would be any danger down here."

"Well, he's dead."

"And I'm sorry, but I must have the package. It is of no value to anyone but me, but if it falls into the wrong hands it could ruin me."

The wine bottle gurgled again. Then Scobey held it up to the light and saw that it was empty.

"You're staying here after tonight?"

Scobey shrugged in the darkness. "I don't know."

"I'll be in touch with you. If the package turns up, hold it for me. I'll pay you as well as I paid Charlie Blue."

He was gone as quietly as he came. When Scobey finally thought of Charlie Blue's final payment he shivered. A breeze from the window cooled the drenching sweat on his body and his legs quivered while he pulled on his trousers. He needed a drink badly, and Dudley was his only source. The hallway was empty and Scobey rang the little bell on the desk as softly as possible.

Dudley came out faster than Scobey had expected and it startled him to silence for a moment. Dudley's gray hair was mussed, and he wore an undershirt and shorts beneath an old red robe, showing most of his bony legs and thin chest. He hadn't been asleep, Scobey figured; Dudley's blue eyes were sharp beneath bushy gray brows.

"What in the hell do you want?" Dudley's voice was as sharp as his eyes.

"I need a bottle," Scobey answered weakly.

"You got two fifty?"

Scobey pulled out two wrinkled dollar bills and two quarters and placed them on the desk. Dudley disappeared behind the desk and came up with a bottle. The exchange was made and Scobey started to leave.

"The next time you wake me up at four in the morning it's going to cost you twice that. You bums and your wine make me sick."

We make you rich too, Scobey thought. He wanted to ask Dudley about the two men who had killed Charlie Blue and if he had seen the man who had come in his room, but didn't.

The wine had finally calmed Scobey. His sleep wasn't a good sleep; it was filled with nightmares of Dudley and the notch-nosed stranger and Detective Julian. Charlie Blue was there too, but he kept vanishing, and Scobey was glad when he finally woke up, close to noon.

He dressed slowly in the still-

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damp clothes. The slow drizzle was continuing to fall outside, and he dreaded leaving the room; but he also dreaded staying. Charlie would have known what to do, but Charlie wasn't here any more.

Scobey drank what was left of the wine, picked at the whiskers on his face, and finally walked out. He would ask Dudley if it was all right to change rooms.

Dudley was willing.

"Sure you can change rooms, Scobey, anytime you want. But the rent on the one you got don't count. You can move anywhere in this place as long as you put the cash on the line. Understand?"

Scobey wandered. He ate a little and had a few glasses of wine. There weren't many places to stand in out of the rain and he didn't want to spend all his money across the bar when it was so much cheaper by the bottle, and he walked the streets. He saw a few others he knew, but most of them had little to say about the death of Charlie Blue. They had troubles of their own. One did belittle Charlie for waving money around in the liquor store when so many of them were broke.

Scobey tried not to think of his visitor in the early morning hours, but it kept coming back. Sometimes, when he tried real hard to forget, memories would slip away, but not this time. It was after four when he went into a telephone booth. The number was easy to find and he dialed with a nervous finger. He asked for Detective Julian and was told to wait a moment.

"This is Scobey," he started, embarrassed for no good reason when Julian answered. "I was in there last night."

"What now, Scobey?"

"There was a man got into my room somehow this morning about four o'clock."

"You've got the wrong department, Scobey. This is Homicide. You want me to switch your call?"

"You don't get it. He was looking for the package?"

"What package?"

"The one he gave Charlie Blue?"

"The one who gave Charlie Blue?"

"That notch-nosed man, the one I told you about last night."

"Have you been drinking again, Scobey?"

"I guess a little." Scobey fidgeted and sweated in the cramped booth.

"Scobey, were you and Charlie Blue very close?"

"Pretty close."

"Maybe you've been drinking too much. The shock of losing a friend can do things to a person. Are you sure you didn't imagine this visitor?"

"I didn't dream it, if that's what you mean."

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"Don't feel bad about it, Scobey. We go through this occasionally, with people from all walks of life. You're trying so hard to believe what Charlie Blue told you that you dreamed or imagined something so strong that now it's real to you. Lay off the vino for a few days, get a few good meals under your belt, and take your mind off the death of Charlie Blue. You'll be all right."

Scobey didn't mind the rain. He didn't notice the chilling drops as they pelted his bare head and ran down his face. His sockless feet squished in the slightly oversize brogans, but Scobey didn't care. Detective Julian not only didn't believe his story, but now he actually thought Scobey was crazy.

Scobey thought of a lot of things. He thought of going to the railroad yards and catching a train out, but he didn't go. Just the idea of going to a new place by himself somehow lost its appeal before he even made an effort to start. He thought of going back to the hotel and moving out, but telling Dudley off first. But the more he thought of Dudley, the less he was inclined to do it. And he thought of Detective Julian.

He wondered what Detective Julian would say if Scobey suddenly called him again and told him just what he thought. The police would never catch the killers of Charlie Blue if they wouldn't even listen when you tried to tell them the truth. They better start looking for that box and the man with the notch in his nose and quit trying to find two bums that never existed except in Dudley's mind.

He was still thinking when the bartender told him to either buy another or move on. Scobey moved on.

It was almost midnight and Scobey expected Dudley to be asleep, but he wasn't. Scobey kept his head down and his eyes on the floor when he walked past the desk, but Dudley wouldn't let him pass.

"Did you send the cops around here tonight? They been asking all kinds of questions."

Scobey shook his head.

"Well, somebody called them. They had a complaint about somebody breaking into one of the rooms. You're the only one around here crazy enough to tell them that."

Scobey tried to ease on by, but Dudley grabbed his arm and shook a fist in his face.

"You cause me any more trouble and so help me I'll kick you out on the street. I ain't got to put up with you, wine-crazy and having nightmares. I don't care if you're paid up for six months, one more time and out you go."

He wasn't crazy, Scobey knew, and how could Dudley be so sure

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he was the one that called the cops? He slept and dreamed a lot, but when he woke he knew the difference between a dream and the real thing, no matter how much wine he drank. He knew the notch-nosed man was real, regardless of what Detective Julian and Dudley said.

When Scobey started out the next morning, Dudley was cleaning the stairway. He couldn't let Scobey pass without a word.

"Anybody crawl out of the bottle to visit you last night, Scobey? Drink enough and maybe your buddy will come back—or you'll go to where he is."

Scobey ignored the barbs. He stopped just inside the door to admire the new car parked at the curb. Sometimes people came down here to the hock shops or surplus stores to pick up bargains, and Scobey thought of how long it had been since he had been inside a new car.

He swung the hotel door open and stepped out, and as soon as he hit the sidewalk he felt the man push in behind him. Suddenly the back door of the new car swung open and before he knew what was happening, Scobey was pushed into the rear seat. As the car pulled away from the curb, Scobey could see Dudley, bent over on the stairs, looking at him with the most surprised look on his face.

The man who had pushed him jumped back into the car, and the driver slid the car away from the curb and started threading his way through the morning rush-hour traffic as if nothing out of the ordinary had happened. In minutes Scobey couldn't recognize a street or building that was familiar. He sat about halfway back on the seat, palms rubbing nervously up and down on the insides of his legs, and waited for somebody to speak. Sweat began to pop out on his head and face, and the hangover from last night began to ask for today's cure. The car picked up speed when it reached the suburbs, and still neither man spoke.

Scobey never knew how long they drove, but they finally turned off the paved road, following a dirt road through a little grove of trees. They came to a stop on a high bluff overlooking a rushing river, fifty feet below.

The driver was a thin gaunt man, an albino. His eyes were hidden by a pair of heavy dark glasses and what mouth he had was almost colorless, just a thin line in a tissue-paper face. Fine, silvery hair was plastered down on a conical-shaped head.

The other man was dark and fleshy, with a broad flat face and wide full mouth. His ears were the biggest Scobey had ever seen, large and heavy, sticking straight out from his head.

"You're hard to find." The big-

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eared man spoke in a coarse husky voice.

"I ain't been anywhere," Scobey apologized.

"All you bums look alike. Yesterday we picked up the wrong guy."

"Where's the box?" The albino spoke, and his voice was intense.

Scobey jumped, then wiped the sweat from his face with a quivering hand. His stomach was doing flip-flops and he needed fresh air, but he was afraid to open the window. He could see the river, swollen from the week-long rain, boiling fifty feet below.

"I don't know," he finally managed in a voice he hardly recognized.

Big Ears grabbed the front of his jacket.

"The package your pal had the other night—where is it?"

"Honest, I don't know. He took it with him when he left the room."

Big Ears shook him. "We want that package. You give it to us or you get what your pal got."

Scobey shook his head. He wanted a drink, but most of all, he just wanted to be left alone. He wasn't even surprised when Big Ears took out a switchblade knife and began flipping it open, then closing it slowly. He wasn't surprised, but he was scared.

Albino shook his head and leaned toward the car pocket. Scobey held his breath when Albino's hand came out, but it held a fifth of vodka instead of the gun that Scobey had expected. Albino took a sip from the bottle and passed it to Big Ears. Neither of them knew how to drink, Scobey thought. Albino held the bottle toward Scobey, then pulled it away when he timidly reached for it.

"We need that box, fella." His high thin voice set Scobey on edge.

"I swear I ain't seen it since the other night. I swear it!"

Big Ears grabbed the front of his field jacket again and shook him. Albino held the bottle out again, then pulled it away again. He and Big Ears ostentatiously took more sips. Little itches scampered across Scobey's skin, but he didn't move. His nose began to run and he finally wiped it with the sleeve of his jacket.

"The package, bum," Big Ears demanded.

Scobey squeezed the meat of his thighs as hard as he could. "I don't know where it is. I wish I never had. And I wish I never had left the Mission that night and I wish Charlie Blue had never seen that man with the notch in his nose, but nobody believes me when I tell them the truth. I just wish everybody would leave me alone, but I don't guess it makes any difference any more."

This time Albino let him drink. Scobey took a long one, almost

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expecting vinegar after all the rest, but it was vodka, pure and straight. It burned a hole in his gullet and started a fire in his guts, but Scobey didn't care. It was wonderful.

Scobey could barely see Albino's eyes behind the thick lenses, but there was no mistaking the tone of his voice. "Your buddy didn't have the package. We know that for a fact. That package is still somewhere down on Skid Row. Guys like us can't go down there and make a lot of noise without being noticed. But you can. We want that package and one way or another we're going to get it. Maybe you don't know where it is, but you can find out. When you do, let us know. We'll be in touch. Understand?"

Big Ears couldn't let it stop there. "You might even know right now." He held up the open switchblade and shook the point at Scobey. "If I thought you did I'd cut your throat and throw you in the river. You're getting a break, bum."

Albino's squeak cut him off. "Just me and my pal here, understand. Don't go to nobody else. Got it?"

Scobey nodded. "Got it."

Scobey walked along the edge of the muddy road back to the main highway. His feet made sloshing sounds in the water and his thin trousers stuck to his legs, but he felt good. He was still alive.

A bus-stop sign across the highway caught his eye, and Scobey began to feel as if his luck was changing. He walked over and leaned against the sign, waiting for the bus and unmindful of the pattering rain. A youngster on a bicycle whizzed by, made a turn, and pedaled back to Scobey, skidding his back tire and spurting dirty water on Scobey's already soaked pants.

"If you're waiting for a bus, mister, you got a long wait. It just runs every two hours and it came by about ten minutes ago."

He walked, every step of the way. The number of miles didn't matter as long as he just kept putting one foot ahead of the other. He stopped once at a bar, but the bartender took one look at him and refused to serve him. His feet were sore and his legs cramping by the time he got back to Skid Row.

He thought about calling Detective Julian and telling him about the ride, but decided against it. He would just be considered crazier than before. The bartender in the Three Star did serve him, but made him stand to keep from getting a seat wet. Finally he bought two bottles of wine and trudged up to his room. He was glad Dudley wasn't around when he passed the desk.

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His wet shoes left marks on the linoleum floor and he got rid of them first. It wasn't until he started to stretch his trousers out across Charlie's bed that he saw the package. It was there, right in the center of the old army blanket. Scobey looked at it, his mouth open, then turned away and reached for the wine.

Julian came to his mind first, but he was afraid of the detective. If the package was valuable, somebody would be accused of stealing it, and Scobey didn't want to be the one. The notch-nosed man had promised to pay, but Scobey didn't know what the reward would be. A knife in the back or a bullet in the brain seemed more likely than money. And the other two, Albino and Big Ears, would let him live only long enough to hand them the package.

Scobey sat on the side of the bed, the wine bottle dangling between his knees. I'll leave tomorrow, Scobey thought. I'll just leave and let whoever finds it have it. That package has brought me more trouble than anything since I started drinking fifteen years ago. I can make it alone.

Scobey was taking another long drink from the bottle when the sound of knuckles rapping on the door almost choked him.

"Just a minute," he managed to croak.

Scobey tried to get into his wet trousers and hide the box at the same time. One of the half-open dresser drawers beckoned and he shoved the box inside.

Detective Julian stood outside. Scobey almost blacked out, and Julian stepped inside and began searching the bare room with his eyes. Scobey's hands and feet lost all circulation and his head swam. Julian looked at his wet clothes.

"You ought to stay inside on a day like this, Scobey. We want you back down at the station tomorrow afternoon. A few more questions, and then you'll have to sign a statement. It won't take long."

"Okay," was all Scobey was able to manage.

Julian picked up one of the bottles of wine and sadly shook his head.

"Don't drink any more of this stuff, either. We want a straight story, not some figment of a wine bottle's imagination."

Julian left and Scobey collapsed on the bed . . .

Darkness had come by the time Scobey awakened. The fear during his morning ride, the fatigue from the long walk back, the finding of the package, and then the visit of Julian had been too much. A sympathetic sleep had enveloped him, and for a while he had escaped; but now all the events came flooding back. He walked slowly to the dresser drawer and looked inside.

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The package was still there. He slammed the drawer and squeezed his eyes shut.

The wine helped, but not much. Every noise outside, every tread on the stairs brought a new panic to Scobey. Several times he went to the window and looked out. Every car of a late model seemed to carry two men in the front seat, one albino and one broad, fleshy, big-eared man. The wine soured on his stomach and he wanted to throw up.

Scobey thought about the package and nothing else. Time after time he went to the dresser drawer and looked inside. Sure enough, it was just about the size of a shoebox. It was wrapped in brown paper and tied with a piece of string, but when Scobey looked at it real close, it appeared as if someone might have tampered with the wrapping.

He and Charlie Blue hadn't opened it. But Charlie had been killed because of it, and Scobey had been threatened. Suppose it *was* a pair of shoes, he thought, the real package long gone. Scobey opened the drawer again and squinted while he looked inside. Suddenly it became important to him to see what was in the package. He didn't want to think all this trouble had been because of a pair of shoes.

His hands quivered when he carried the package to his bed. The string was loose, he saw, and the scotch tape had been pulled loose and stuck back. Slowly he worked the string toward the corner of the box, careful not to break the string or rip the paper. The tape came loose easily and he took the wrapping off as quietly as possible. Every sound was magnified and he wondered if the crinkling of paper could be heard down the hall.

The box was heavier than a shoebox and of different construction. The lid went all the way down to the bottom of the box. Before he removed the lid, he tiptoed to the door and pressed his ear against it, then walked to the window and looked out. Eleven o'clock, and the street was still busy, but there were no cars at the curb. A few bums hid from the rain in the doorway of the all-night café across the street and two cops passed by in a police cruiser.

He hurried back to the bed and gulped down another drink. Slowly he rubbed his hands together, then reached for the box, his heart pounding and his blood pumping. Somehow the sound of footsteps in the hallway had escaped him and the sudden knock on the door petrified him.

"You in there, Scobey." It was Dudley's voice.

Scobey's breath finally came back enough to allow a weak "Yes."

"You got a phone call."

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"Okay. I'm coming."

The dresser drawer devoured the package again. The phone booth was halfway down the hall past the desk and Scobey hurried, head down, afraid of Dudley's vicious tongue.

"This is Scobey." His voice was a whisper.

"Remember me, Scobey?" The notch-nosed man was calling.

"Yes."

"Have you found out anything I should know about?"

Scobey didn't have a ready answer. His mind was jumbled, whirling. This might be his only chance to get rid of the package and possibly be alive when it was done. He could give it to Notch Nose and be ready to leave town at daylight.

"I've got the package," Scobey managed.

The breathing on the other end of the line stopped. When it came again, it was heavy and fast with excitement.

"Where is it?"

"In my room at the hotel. You can have it."

There was a short silence. "I can't get there right now. I'm being watched and it would put both of us in danger"

"You don't have to come all the way up to my room. Just stand on the sidewalk under my window and I'll throw it down to you. I don't even want any money."

"No, that won't do, either. Listen, Scobey, it's almost midnight now. You sit tight and I'll be there between six and eight."

"I can't wait that long."

"You'll have to. If I'm being watched, maybe you are, too. Maybe it wouldn't be smart for you to try to leave right now."

Fear fluttered over S c o b e y again. "Okay. I'll wait."

"When I get there, it should be safe for a few minutes. You can give me the package and then we'll both leave. And, Scobey, don't look inside that box. It may give you some knowledge you wouldn't want to have."

"You're the strangest wino I've ever seen," Dudley complained when Scobey passed the desk on the way back to his r o o m. "Nightmares, visitors, phone calls. I wish you'd find some other place to stay."

Six or eight hours to go, depending on what time Notch Nose came by. Once more the package came out of the dresser drawer. It was dangerous, Scobey knew, although it looked h a r m l e s s enough. Once again he took a long drink of wine and rubbed his palms t o g e t h e r nervously. Then patiently he began placing the brown wrapping paper back the way it had been and working the string back in place.

Scobey turned out his light and stretched out on the bed, hoping for sleep. Every sound, inside and

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outside, exploded in his eardrums. Every few minutes he would almost jump from his bed to check the clock across the street. The hands seemed to move little, if at all.

1:15. 1:35. 2:10.

The last time he looked it was 2:58.

Finally sleep came, but it was not restful. He moaned and jerked, and the package grew legs and chased him in his dreams. When he did wake up he almost leaped from the bed.

Scobey looked at the clock. 5:45. He hurried to the dresser and saw that the package was still there. The second bottle of wine was open and he drank it in gulps, feeling it bounce off the walls of his stomach and run up and down his gullet. He wanted to be sick, but he kept it down.

His panic played tricks on him. Footsteps seemed to sound continually on the stairs. Every car going past sounded as if it stopped and parked at the curb. Scobey didn't know. He was afraid to look.

His clothes were still damp, but by six he was dressed and ready to leave. He would go now, except for the certain knowledge that if he tried there would be somebody out there to stop him.

There was no knock on the door, only the soft voice of Notch Nose.

"Scobey."

It took an effort for him to open the door. His visitor hurried inside. Scobey got his first good look at the man. He was tall and slim, and the notch was right where Scobey knew it would be. His face was pale, and his eyes were quick nervous beads that covered everything in the room.

"Where is it?"

Scobey pointed to the dresser drawer. Delicate, long-fingered hands fluttered as the package was lifted out. Notch Nose was in too big a hurry to notice that the wrapping had been tampered with. He just stuck it under his black raincoat and hurried to the window for a quick glance outside. When he turned back to Scobey there was living fear in his eyes and his face was paler than before.

"Is there a back way out of here?" His voice was urgent.

"Yes, but it's always locked."

The man dug in his pocket and came out with a roll of bills, pressing them on Scobey.

"Get it open. And hurry!"

Scobey grabbed the wine bottle and his field jacket. The halls were vacant, but the door across the hall was partially open. Scobey jumped when he thought he saw a shadow move in the open room, but another look and it was gone. Notch Nose was right on his heels as Scobey headed for the desk.

Dudley sat at the desk, but in

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a state of shock. His mouth was open and his eyes stared at the open stairway. Scobey tried to bring him back with the roll of bills, but even money wouldn't pull his eyes away from the stairs.

Terror crawled around Scobey's body, inside and out, but he forced his eyes to the stairs. Albino was halfway up and coming fast, with Big Ears breathing down his neck. Both carried guns, and Albino's transparent skin cracked in a smile.

Notch Nose looked for a place to run. The package was still under his coat and he took it out, looking at it helplessly. Scobey and Dudley were statued onlookers, the edges of the crumpled bills sticking out of Scobey's outstretched hand.

"The package, Francis," Albino squeaked.

Notch Nose looked at the package, then began to push it forward gently.

"Don't try anything, Francis," Albino warned. "I'll kill you."

"Hold it!"

The voice came from the foot of the stairs. Detective Julian and a uniformed policeman came through the door and headed up the stairs. Two men, dressed like bums, came through the open doorway across the hall from Scobey's room, but they had guns pointed directly at Albino and Big Ears. Two more uniforms crowded in through the door at the foot of the stairs. Albino's hand shook while he tried to make his decision. Finally the shaking stopped and he let the weight of the weapon carry his hand harmlessly to his side.

Scobey was in Police Headquarters again, but this time he wasn't sweating. The box full of necklaces, pendants, rings, brooches, and bracelets bugged his eyes. He looked at them with a thoughtful smile. For one night they had been his.

"They were society jewel thieves, Scobey. Francis Hammond is, or was, a hairdresser in a salon catering to the rich. In a few conversations he could pick up all the information he needed. Then he would pass it on to Albino and Big Ears. The last job looked so easy that Francis tried to do it himself. The other two read about it and went after him. When he went down to Skid Row he thought he had given them the slip."

"And that's when he found Charlie Blue," Scobey interrupted.

"Not at first. Dudley was hired to be the first go-between, but he got scared when he saw Albino and Big Ears sniffing around. He knew you and Charlie Blue, and when he saw Charlie out trying to make a touch he put Francis onto him. The jewelry was going back to the insurance company at a bargain, and Francis was

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going to skip town until things cooled off for him."

"But where was the package all that time?"

"Dudley had it. When Charlie started out of the hotel he must have seen or sensed that something was wrong, and he just gave Dudley the package to hold for him. And Dudley did see the killing, but he was afraid to give the right description. Besides, he was going to keep the package himself until he saw Albino and Big Ears take you for a ride. Then his fear overcame his greed and he put the package in your room. That ride scared us, too. We had those two men staked out across the hall from you ever since Francis Hammond paid you the first night-time visit, but we couldn't follow you out on that bluff without blowing the whole operation."

"And you couldn't even give me a ride back to town."

"No, but don't feel too bad about that. If it hadn't been for you we might never have cracked this one. It wasn't until we passed your description of the notch-nosed man around headquarters that we got our first break on the case. Some of the women victims identified him, and the rest was easy."

Scobey shook his head. "Why didn't you just go ahead and pick him up then?"

"Well, we had the robbery solved, Scobey, but there was something even more important to us than solving the robbery."

"What was that?"

"Charlie Blue was dead. We wanted his killers. You were our only connection with Charlie Blue and we used you. We didn't think you'd mind after we caught the killers."

Scobey smiled weakly. "No, I didn't mind."

Several days later, Julian headed the patrol car down Barcom Street. The sun was out and the inhabitants of Skid Row filled the sidewalks. Several times Julian thought he saw Scobey, but he wasn't sure. His detective's mind tried to catalogue a description of the lonesome wino, but not much came to his mind. He hoped that somewhere down the line there was another Charlie Blue, and that Scobey would find him.

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When we made inquiries about Joan Fleming, we were surprised at how little information was available. The only personal detail we could discover was that she "lives in the lovely little village of Broadway in the Cotswolds, England." About her mystery novels, we found this quote from Anthony Boucher: "She never writes the same book twice," and he praised not only her versatility but her ingenuity. And as evidence of the high quality of her work we learned that her suspense novel titled WHEN I GROW RICH *won the Crime Writers Award in England for the best crime novel of 1962.*

Now we welcome Joan Fleming to the pages of EQMM and hope that we can bring you more of her work in the near future . . .

They were partners in an antique shop, a business which seemed to fit both of them, after their own fashion. True, Mr. Comfort's name fitted his partner more easily, and Clowd's name (at least the sound of it) could more easily have been Mr. Comfort's—the strange sort of paradox that so often occurs in life. But the connotation of names is only one of the reasons this story will make you feel uneasy . . .

DEAD AND GONE

by JOAN FLEMING

DEAD IS DEAD AND GONE IS gone, and there was no doubt about it that Clowd was dead and gone, as dead as mutton or any other dead thing, and gone to earth in Kensal Green Cemetery.

Mr. Comfort had waited a long time for Clowd to die; for weeks, for months, indeed for years. And now at last Clowd had shuffled off—and shuffled off was the word for it, for he had suffered from a slowly progressive disease which paralyzed him by degrees. For years Mr. Comfort had watched his partner going downhill, slowly, slowly. For years he himself had suffered from

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severe heart attacks, and sometimes it would seem that, after all, Comfort would go before Clowd.

Clowd would laugh when Mr. Comfort returned to work after one of his attacks. "I'll see you out yet!" he would say.

Oh, no, you won't! thought Mr. Comfort, and he saw to it that he stayed alive. Sometimes the pain he suffered was so acute that he almost wished to die, but he knew that he couldn't; he knew that he must stay and see Clowd out.

It was a matter of principle. Clowd, it had always been understood, was the inferior person. A great deal younger than Mr. Comfort, he had been taken into partnership in a weak moment when it looked as though Mr. Comfort would have to close down his antique business and seek a job. But ever since Clowd had been taken on, the business had flourished; Clowd was, as it were, a talisman.

Though his partner was a spendthrift and altogether a tiresome person, Mr. Comfort was superstitious about dissolving the partnership. Clowd was so good with customers, so charming and gay, he beguiled them into buying things that they were not sure they wanted. Mr. Comfort, on the other hand, was morose. It was much more in his line to go round to sales, picking up bargains with which to supply the shop; he couldn't be bothered with the customers. But without the customers, of course, there would have been no use having a shop at all.

So Mr. Comfort quietly loathed Clowd. Once he is dead, he used to plan, things will be very different. He would have a pretty woman in the shop, a pliable young creature who would charm the customers just as much, and be a little less prodigal with money, a young woman whom he could forbid to reduce the prices. Clowd's habit of cheapening prices was a torment. Mr. Comfort would forbid any reduction at all.

But Clowd was in no hurry to die: he fell away before one's eyes, but he continued to live, to laugh and to joke, to make fun of his own disabilities and to be lighthearted about money.

"What are you saving up for, you mean old wretch?" Clowd would chaff him. "Remember, there are no pockets in a shroud!"

"The less said about shrouds the better," Mr. Comfort grunted meaningly.

Yes, Clowd had thought himself very clever: with full panoply of lawyer and witnesses, he had made his will. He made it a long time ago, when he first became ill. He had provided for that dim little woman he called his wife and their sickly child by leaving

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his share of the business of Comfort and Clowd to her. He had insisted that Mr. Comfort do the same, and as Mr. Comfort had no dependents of his own and as this was at the beginning of the partnership, before he had come to detest Clowd so thoroughly, Mr. Comfort had grudgingly agreed and had signed the documents accordingly.

Now, however, that Clowd was really dead and gone, at last, Mr. Comfort intended to out-Clowd Clowd. *He,* Comfort, would be just as clever as Clowd thought himself to be. Now that the business was his, and he considered, his alone, he was going to adjust the books. Alone in the office in the evenings, he, Comfort, was going to copy out all purchases and sales of the last two years into fresh books, and these new entires would show that the business of Comfort and Clowd was worthless. He would prove that they were bankrupt. Carey Street had no fears for him; he would willingly go through the bankruptcy court if it meant, as it would, that the wretched dependents of his late partner would have to go without their share of the profits.

Already, weeks before Clowd had finally departed this life, Mr. Comfort had bought the new account books and was leaving them lying about the place so that they would become dusty and used-looking. He hated to spend the money on the books, but he fondled them lovingly because of all that they were going to mean to him.

Mr. Comfort lived over the shop, but Clowd lived in a little house at Kensal Rise. There were flowers in the garden and roses round the door and all that sort of nonsense; Mr. Comfort had never been there, but he had often had it described to him by the proud owner, and it made him sick. It made him sick partly because of the shocking waste of money and partly because of the tribute it implied to Clowd's business abilities.

Well, that could all be put behind him now, because Clowd was gone, finally and forever, and already, less than a week after his death, Mr. Comfort was feeling a great deal better; he had not had one of his attacks since Clowd had died, and he would not be surprised if he recovered from them altogether. The painful mortification of Clowd's continued existence now being over, Mr. Comfort would not be surprised if he took a new lease on life; he almost skipped as he alighted from the bus bringing him back from the cemetery. He would celebrate, he decided, by buying half a pound of beef sausages for his tea from the delicatessen shop next door.

In deference to the dead, the

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antique shop had been closed for the day. When Mr. Comfort let himself in it smelled musty, strangely unoccupied. When he turned on the light he saw, with a pang, that it looked neglected. Clowd had been very particular about the condition of their stock; he had spent a great deal of time polishing and furbishing. Mr. Comfort could not see the point; it had been yet another bone of contention.

"People prefer to buy antiques in a dirty condition," he always said.

Never mind, that was all over now. The business was all his own, and he would run it just as he liked; he could, if he liked, allow dust to settle and spider's webs to hang, and there was no one to gainsay him.

With the sausages merrily frying on the gas ring, he thought over the afternoon. It had been a perfect day for a funeral, to be sure. A bitter wind and a low-hung sky of a livid white. There had been a surprising number of people round the grave. Mr. Comfort had spoken to no one; he would not, in fact, have gone to the funeral had he not wanted to make quite sure that Clowd was really disposed of, finally and forever.

He noted the widow, a little slip of a white-faced thing, holding by the hand an equally white-faced child. Dry-eyed, composed, Mrs. Clowd had thrown a handful of soil onto the coffin, and had stood, staring down into the grave, until the parson had touched her arm to wake her from her reverie.

Mr. Comfort had waited until the first few shovelfuls of soil had gone down on top of Clowd, then he had turned away and walked slowly down the long avenue to the main entrance, past the trestle table on which winkles and jellied eels were being sold, to the bus stop. He felt like leaping, but he was only able to hoist himself on board the bus with the assistance of the conductor.

So Clowd was dead and gone.

With great relish Mr. Comfort ate four beef sausages, four slices of white bread and margarine, and drank four cups of tea, orange-colored and sickly sweet—it was, indeed, a celebration. Mr. Comfort gobbled the meat of this gargantuan saturnalia rather too rapidly—he could hardly wait to start work on the new account books.

Gulping down the last mouthful, but still chewing certain odd remnants, he hurried downstairs to the office at the back of the shop, rubbing his hands together so that they sounded like the dry leaves outside, blowing along the concrete pavement.

Then he set to work, by the light of a candle to save electricity, bending over his books.

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The evening marched on, ootsteps outside became less and ess frequent, the last bus rumbled past, a policeman trudged by. Then there was silence, except for he leaves and odd fragments of paper which the wind, every now and then, hustled past the closed shop.

It was quiet, very quiet. It was cold, too, in the office. Mr. Comfort was wearing his overcoat and there was a moth-eaten rug over his knees. Yet, it was cold and quiet.

As cold as the grave.

And as quiet.

Clowd would be very cold now, n the damp clay.

And how quiet it would be down there, how quiet for Clowd, who had always been so noisy, who had always liked people around him, and laughter.

Yes, Clowd would be very quiet now.

Mr. Comfort's pen ceased scratching at the paper as he thought these solemn thoughts.

A little cluster of leaves again blew past outside, a little whispered requiem for Clowd.

Then the telephone rang.

The blood circulating sluggishly round Mr. Comfort's veins seemed to stop and go into reverse. He had a fright. He swallowed once or twice, disposing, as it were, of his shock.

It would be the wrong number, of course.

Mr. Comfort lifted the receiver and opened his mouth, but no words came out, for at once a voice said, "Is that you, Comfort? Clowd here." A pause. "Did you hear me? C-l-o-w-d, Clowd."

There was another pause, during which Mr. Comfort heard a curious soft regular sound, almost a rustle, like the leaves on the pavement outside. A ghostly sound.

There was never a shadow of doubt in Mr. Comfort's mind that it was Clowd's voice. There was no *question* about it. It was not muffled, or husky, or squeaky, or disguised in any way. It was, quite simply, Clowd's voice.

"That *is* you, Comfort, isn't it? There is something I wanted to say to you. I forgot to say it before I died . . . "

But Mr. Comfort never heard what his late partner wanted to say. For he, too, had died.

In a small villa somewhere in Kensal Rise there was a fire, even at this late hour, still burning in the grate, and presently the fire flared up, in a big burst of fire-laughter, for there was something unusual being burned, something inflammable, and the leaping flames lighted up the set features and sad little mouth of the small woman who held the object firmly in place with the poker.

She was burning a gramophone record.

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a NEW mystery by

PATRICIA HIGHSMITH

Strictly speaking, Patricia Highsmith's newest story is not in EQMM's field. And yet—even strictly speaking—why isn't it? Surely it contains mystery—in the "purest" sense imaginable. And if you accept Patricia Highsmith's premise (and you will!—her ability to create "willing suspension of disbelief" is remarkable, uncanny), then this story is not only a mystery, it is also a crime story.

But we admit that most readers will consider "The Nature of the Thing" a fantasy-mystery. All right, we will not argue the point further. But Patricia Highsmith writes fantasy-mystery so hauntingly, so compellingly, that we confess we can't resist her "offbeat" tales. We hope you too can't resist them.

And this one will *haunt you . . . Are people becoming square?—in both meanings of the word, "straight" and "slang." Think about it. Think about all its implications . . .*

THE NATURE OF THE THING

by PATRICIA HIGHSMITH

ELEANOR HAD BEEN SEWING nearly all day—sewing after dinner, too—and it was now almost midnight. She looked away from her machine, s i d e w a y s toward the hall door, and saw something about two feet high, something grayish black, which after a second or two moved and was lost from view in the hall. Eleanor rubbed her eyes. Her eyes smarted, and it was delicious to rub them. But since she was sure she had not really seen something, she did not get up from her chair to go and investigate. She forgot about it.

She stood up about five minutes later, after tidying her sewing table, putting away her scissors,

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ıd folding the yellow dress hose side seams she had just t out. The dress was ready for Irs. Burns tomorrow. Always tting out, Eleanor thought, never ıking in. People seemed to grow deways, not upward any more, ıd she smiled at this fuzzy little ıought. She was tired, but she ad had a good day. She gave er cat Bessie a saucer of ıilk—rather creamy milk, beause Bessie liked the best of verything—then heated some ıilk for herself and took it in mug up to bed.

The second time she saw it, owever, she was not tired, and ıe sun was shining brightly. This me she was sitting in the rmchair, putting a zipper in a kirt, and as she knotted her hread, she happened to glance t the door that went into what he called the side room, a room ff the living room at the front ıf the house. She saw a squarish ıgure about two feet high, an ıgly little thing that at first sug;ested an upended sandbag. It ook a moment before she per-eived a large square head, thick eet in heavy shoes, and incredibly hort arms with big hands that langled.

Eleanor was half out of her :hair, her slender body rigid.

The thing didn't move. But it vas looking at her.

Get it out of the house, she hought at once. Shoo it out the door. What *was* it? The face was vaguely human. Eyes looked at her from under hair that was combed forward over the forehead. Had the children put some horrid toy in the house to frighten her? The Rolands next door had four children, the oldest eight. Children's toys these days—you never knew what to expect!

Then the thing moved, advanced slowly into the living room, and Eleanor stepped quickly behind the armchair.

"Get out! Get away!" she said in a voice shrill with panic.

"Um-m," came the reply, soft and deep.

Had she really heard anything? Now it looked up from the floor—where it had stared while entering the room—to her face. The look at her seemed direct, yet was somehow vague and unfocused. The creature went on, toward the electric heater, where it stopped and held out its hands casually to the warmth. It was masculine, Eleanor thought; its legs—if those stumpy things could be called legs—were in trousers. Again the creature took a sidelong look at her, a little shyly, yet as if defying her to get it out of the room.

The cat, curled on a pillow in a chair, lifted her head and yawned, and the movement caught Eleanor's eye. She waited for Bessie to see the thing, straight

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ahead of her and only four feet away; but Bessie put her head down again in a position for sleeping. Now, that was curious!

Eleanor retreated quickly to the kitchen, opened the back door and went out, leaving the door wide-open. She went around to the front door and opened that wide, too. Give the thing a chance to get out! Eleanor stayed on her front walk, ready to run to the road if the creature emerged.

The thing came to the front door and said in a deep voice, the words more a rumble than articulated, "I'm not going to harm you, so why don't you come back in? It's your house." And there was the hint of a shrug in the chunky shoulders.

"I'd like you to get out please!" Eleanor said.

"Um-m." He turned away, back into the living room.

Eleanor thought of going for Mr. Roland next door; he was a practical man who probably had a gun in the house, since he was a captain in the Air Force. Then she remembered that the Rolands had gone off before lunch and that their house was empty. Eleanor gathered her courage and advanced toward the front door.

She didn't see him in the living room. She even looked behind the armchair. She went cautiously toward the side room. He was not in there, either. She looked quite thoroughly.

She stood in the hall and called up the stairs, really called to all the house, "If you're still in this house I wish you would leave!"

Behind her a voice said, "I'm still here."

Eleanor turned and saw him standing in the living room.

"I won't do you any harm. But I can disappear if you prefer. Like this."

She thought she saw a set of bared teeth, as if he were making an effort. As she stared, the creature became a paler gray, and more fuzzy at the edges. And after ten seconds there was nothing. *Nothing!* Was she losing her mind? She must tell Dr. Campbell, she thought. First thing tomorrow morning, she would go to his office and tell him honestly what had happened—what she thought had happened.

The rest of the day, and the evening, passed without incident. Mrs. Burns came for her dress and brought a coat to be shortened. Eleanor watched a television program, then went to bed at half-past ten. She had thought she would be frightened—going to bed and turning all the lights out; but she wasn't. And before she had time to worry about whether she could get to sleep or not, she had fallen asleep.

But when she woke up he was the second thing she saw, the first thing being her cat, who had slept at the foot of the bed for warmth.

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Bessie stretched, yawned, and m i a o u w e d simultaneously, demanding breakfast. And hardly two yards away, there he stood, staring at her. Eleanor's promise of immediate breakfast to Bessie was cut short by her seeing him.

"I could use some breakfast myself," he said. Was there a faint smile on that square f a c e? "Nothing much. A piece of bread will do."

Now Eleanor found her teeth tight together, found h e r s e l f wordless. She got out of bed on the other side from him, quickly pulled on her old flannel robe, and went down the stairs. In the kitchen she comforted herself with the usual routine—she put the kettle on, fed Bessie while the kettle was heating, cut some bread. But she was waiting for the thing to appear in the kitchen doorway, and as she was slicing the bread he did a p p e a r. Trembling, Eleanor held a piece of bread toward him.

"If I give you this, would you go away?" she asked.

The monstrous hand reached out and up and took the bread. "Not necessarily," rumbled the bass voice. "I don't need to eat, you know. I thought I'd keep you company, that's all."

Eleanor was not sure, really not sure she had heard it. She was imagining t e l l i n g Dr. Campbell all this, imagining the point at which Dr. Campbell would cut her short—politely, of course, because he was a nice man—and prescribe some kind of sedative.

Bessie finished her breakfast and walked so close by the creature that her fur must have brushed his leg; but the cat showed no sign of feeling or seeing anything. That was proof enough that he didn't exist, E l e a n o r thought.

A strange rumbling "Um-m-m" came from him. He was laughing! "Not everyone—or everything—can see me," he said to Eleanor. "In fact, very few people can see me." He had eaten the bread, apparently.

Eleanor steeled herself to carry on with her breakfast. She cut another piece of bread, got out the butter and jam, scalded the teapot. It was ten to 8:00. By 9:00 she'd be in Dr. Campbell's office.

"Maybe there's something I can do for you today," he said. He had not moved from where he stood. "Odd jobs. I'm strong." the last word was like a nasal burr, like the horn of a large and distant ship.

At once Eleanor thought of the rusty old lawn roller in her barn. She'd rung up Field's, the second-hand dealer, to come and take it away, but they were late as usual, two weeks late. "I have a roller out in the barn. After breakfast you can take it to the

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edge of the road and leave it there, if you will." That would be further proof, Eleanor thought, proof that he wasn't real. The roller must weigh two or three hundred pounds.

He walked, in a slow, rolling gait, out of the kitchen and into the sitting room. He made no sound.

Eleanor ate her breakfast at the scrubbed wooden table in the kitchen, where she often preferred to eat instead of in the dining room. She propped a booklet on sewing tips in front of her, and after a few moments she was able to concentrate on it.

At 8:30, dressed now, Eleanor went out to the barn behind her house. She had not looked for him in the house—didn't know where he was, in fact; but somehow it did not surprise her to find him beside her when she reached the barn door.

"It's in the back corner. I'll show you." She removed the padlock which had not been entirely closed.

He understood at once, rubbed his big yellowish hands together, and took a grip on the wooden handle of the roller. He pulled it toward him with apparently the greatest ease, then began to push it from behind, rolling it. But using the handle was easier, so he took the handle again, and in a few minutes the roller was at the edge of the road.

Billy, the boy who delivered the morning papers, was cycling along the road just then.

Eleanor tensed, thinking Billy would cry out at the sight of him; but the boy only said shyly, "Morning, Mrs. Heathcote," and pedaled on.

"Good morning, Billy," Eleanor called after the boy.

"Anything else?" he asked.

"I can't think of anything, thank you," Eleanor replied rather breathlessly.

"It won't do you any good to speak to your doctor about me," he said.

They were both walking back toward the house, up the carelessly flagstoned path that divided Eleanor's front garden.

"He won't be able to see me, and he'll just give you useless pills," he continued.

What made you think I was going to a doctor, Eleanor wanted to ask. But she knew. He could read her mind. Is he some part of myself? she asked herself, with a flash of intuition which went no further than the question. If no one *else* can see him—

"I am myself," he said, smiling at her over one shoulder. He was leading the way into the house. "Just me." And he laughed.

Eleanor did not go to see Dr. Campbell. She decided to try to ignore him, to go about her usual affairs. Her affairs that morning consisted in walking a quarter of

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a mile to the butcher's for some liver for Bessie and half a chicken for herself, and of buying several articles at Mr. White's, the grocer. But Eleanor was thinking of telling all this to Vance—Mrs. Florence Vansittart—who was her best friend in town. Vance and she had tea together, at one or the other's house, at least once a week—usually once every five days, in fact; so Eleanor phoned Vance as soon as she got home.

The creature was not in sight at that time.

Vance agreed to come over at 4:00. "How *are* you, dear?" Vance asked as she always did.

"All right, thanks," Eleanor replied, more heartily than usual. "And you? . . . I'll make some blueberry muffins if I get my work done in time."

That afternoon, though he had kept out of sight since the morning, he lumbered silently into the room just as Eleanor and Vance were starting on their second cup of tea, and just as Eleanor was drawing breath for the first statement, the introductory statement, of her strange story. She had been thinking that the roller at the edge of the road—she must ring Field's again first thing in the morning—would be proof that what she said was not an hallucination.

"What's the matter, Eleanor?" asked Vance, sitting up a little. She was a woman of Eleanor's age, about 55, one of the many widows in town; but unlike Eleanor, Vance had never worked at anything—she had been left enough money. And Vance looked to her right, at the side-room's door, where Eleanor had been looking. Eleanor took her eyes away from the creature who was now standing inside the door.

"Nothing," Eleanor said. Vance didn't see him, she thought. Vance *can't* see him.

"She can't see me," the creature rumbled to Eleanor.

"Swallow something the wrong way?" Vance asked, chuckling, helping herself to another blueberry muffin.

The creature was staring at the muffins, but came no closer.

"You know, Eleanor—" Vance chewed "—if you're still charging only two dollars for putting a hem up, I think you need your head examined. People around here, all of them could afford to give you twice as much. It's criminal the way you cheat yourself."

Vance meant, Eleanor thought, that it was high time she had her house painted, or recovered the armchair, which she could do herself if she had the time. "It's not easy to mention raising prices, and the people who come to me are used to mine by now."

"Other people manage to mention price-raising pretty easily," Vance said as Eleanor had known she would. "I hear of a new higher price every day!"

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The creature took a muffin. For a few seconds the muffin must have been visible in mid-air to Vance, even if she didn't see him. But suddenly the muffin was gone, chewed by the massive jaw.

"You look a bit absent today, my dear," Vance said. "Something worrying you?" Vance looked at her attentively, waiting for a confidence—such as another tooth extraction that Eleanor felt doomed to, or news that her brother George in Canada, who had never made a go of anything, was once more failing in business.

Eleanor braced herself and said, "I've had a visitor for the last two days. He's standing right here by the table." She nodded her head in his direction.

The creature was looking at Eleanor.

Vance looked where Eleanor had nodded. "What do you mean?"

"You can't see him? . . . He's quite friendly," Eleanor added. "It's a creature two feet high. He's right there. He just took a muffin! I know you don't believe me," she rushed on, "but he moved the roller this morning from the barn to the edge of the road. You saw it at the edge of the road, didn't you? You *said* something about it."

Vance tipped her head to one side, looking in a puzzled way at Eleanor. "You mean a handyman, Old Gufford?"

"No, he's—" But at this moment the creature was walking out of the room, so Vance couldn't possibly see him, and before he disappeared into the side room he gave Eleanor a look and pushed his great hands flat downward in the air, as if to say, "Give it up," or "Don't talk."

"I mean what I said," Eleanor pursued, determined to share her experience, determined also to get some sympathy, even some protection. "I'm not joking, Vance. It's a little—creature two feet high, and he talks to me." Her voice had sunk to a whisper. She glanced at the side-room doorway, which was empty. "You think I'm seeing things, but I'm not, I swear it!"

Vance still looked puzzled, but quite in control of herself, and she even assumed a superior attitude. "How long have you—been seeing him, my dear?" she asked.

"I saw him first two nights ago," Eleanor said, still in a whisper. "Then yesterday quite plainly, in broad daylight. He has a deep voice."

"If he just took a muffin, where is he now?" Vance asked, getting up. "Why can't I see him?"

"He went into the side room. All right, come along."

Eleanor was suddenly aware that she didn't know his name, didn't know how to address him. She and Vance looked into an

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apparently empty room, empty of anything alive except some plants on the window sill. Eleanor looked behind the sofa. "Well—he has the faculty of disappearing."

Vance smiled, again in a superior way. "Eleanor, your eyes are getting worse. Are you using your glasses? That constant sewing—"

"I don't need them for sewing. Only for distance. Matter of fact, I did put them on when I looked at him yesterday across the room." She was wearing her eyeglasses now.

Vance frowned slightly. "My dear, are you afraid of him? . . . It looks like it. Stay with me tonight. Come home with me now, if you like. I can come back with Hester and look the house over thoroughly." Hester was her cleaning woman.

"Oh, I'm sure you wouldn't see him. And I'm not afraid. He's rather friendly. But I *did* want you to believe me."

"How can I believe you if I don't see him?"

"I don't know." Eleanor thought of describing him more accurately. But would that convince Vance, or anybody? "I think I could take a photograph of him. I don't think he'd mind," Eleanor said.

"A good idea! You've got a camera?"

"No. Well, I have, an old one of John's, but—"

"I'll bring mine. This afternoon. Now I'm going to finish my tea."

Vance brought the camera just before 6:00. "Good luck, Eleanor. This should be interesting!" Vance said as she left.

Eleanor could tell that Vance had not believed a single word of what she had told her. The camera said "5" on its indicator. There were eight more pictures on the roll, Vance had said. Eleanor thought two would be enough.

"I don't photograph," his deep voice said on her left, and Eleanor saw him standing in the doorway of the side room. "But I'll pose for you. Um-m-m." It was the deep laugh.

Eleanor felt only a mild start of surprise, or of fear. The sun was still shining. "Would you sit in a chair in the front garden?"

"Certainly," the creature said, and he was clearly amused.

Eleanor picked up the straight chair which she usually sat on when she worked, but he took it from her and went out the front door with it. He set the chair in the garden, careful not to tread on flowers. Then with a little boost he got himself onto the seat and folded his short arms.

The sunlight fell full on his face. Vance had showed Eleanor how to work the camera. It was a simple one compared to John's. She took the picture at the prescribed six-foot distance. Then

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she saw old Gufford, the neighborhood handyman, going by in his little truck, staring at her. They did not usually greet each other, and they did not now, but Eleanor could imagine how odd he must think she was to be taking a picture of an ordinary empty chair in the garden. But she had seen him clearly in the finder. There was no doubt at all about that.

"Could I take one more of you standing next to the chair?" she asked.

"Um-m." That was not a laugh, but a sound of assent. He slid off the chair and stood beside it, one hand resting on the chair's back.

This was splendid, Eleanor thought, because it showed his height compared with that of the chair.

Click!

"Thank you."

"They won't turn out," he remarked, and took the chair back into the house.

"If you'd like another muffin," Eleanor said, wanting to be polite and thinking also he might have resented her asking him to be photographed, "they're in the kitchen."

"I know. I don't need to eat. I just took one to see if your friend would notice. She didn't. Not many do."

Eleanor thought again of the muffin in mid-air for a few seconds—it must have been—but she said nothing. "I—I don't know what to call you. Have you got a name?"

A fuzzy, rather general expression of amusement came over his square face. "Lots of names. No particular name. No one speaks to me, so there's no need of a name."

"I speak to you," Eleanor said.

He was standing by the stove now, not as high, not nearly as high as the gas burners. His skin looked dry, yellowish, and his face somehow sad. She felt sorry for him.

"Where have you been living?"

He laughed. "Um-m-m. I live anywhere, everywhere. It doesn't matter."

She wanted to ask some questions, such as, "Do you feel the cold?" but she did not want to be personal, or seem to be prying. "It occurred to me you might like a bed," she said more brightly. "You could sleep on the couch in the side room. I mean, with a blanket."

Again a laugh. "I don't need to sleep. But it's a kind thought. You're very kind."

His eyes moved to the door as Bessie walked in, making for her tablecloth of newspaper on which stood her bowl of water and her unfinished bowl of creamy milk. His eyes followed the cat.

Eleanor felt a sudden ap-

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prehension. It was probably because Bessie had not seen him. That was certainly disturbing, when she could see him so well that even the wrinkles in his face were quite visible. He was clothed in strange material, gray-black, neither shiny nor dull.

"You must be lonely since your husband died," he said. "But I admit you do well. Considering he didn't leave you much."

Eleanor blushed. She could feel it. John hadn't been a big earner, certainly. But he was a decent man, a good husband—yes, he had been that. And their only child, a daughter, had been killed in a snow avalanche in Austria when she was twenty. Eleanor never thought of Penny. She had set herself never to think of Penny. She was disturbed, and felt awkward, because she thought of her now. And she hoped the creature would not mention Penny. Her death was one of life's tragedies. But other families had similar tragedies—only sons killed in useless wars.

"Now you have your cat," he said, as if he read her thoughts.

"Yes," Eleanor said, glad to change the subject. "Bessie is ten. She's had fifty-seven kittens. But three—no four years ago, I finally had her doctored. She's a dear companion."

Eleanor slipped away and got a big gray blanket, an army-surplus blanket, from a closet and folded it in half on the couch in the side room. He stood watching her. She put a pillow under the top part of the blanket. "That's a little cosier," she said.

"Thank you," came the deep voice.

In the next few days he cut the high grass around the barn with a scythe and moved a huge rock that had always annoyed Eleanor, embedded as it was in the middle of a grassy square in front of the barn. It was August, but quite cool. They cleared out the attic, and he carried the heaviest things downstairs and to the edge of the road to be picked up by Field's. Some of these things were sold a few days later at auction, and fetched nearly $30.

Eleanor still felt a slight tenseness when he was present, a fear that she might annoy him in some way; and yet in another way, she was growing used to him. He certainly liked to be helpful. At night he obligingly got onto his couch bed, and she wanted to tuck him in, to bring him some cookies and a glass of milk; but he ate and drank next to nothing, and then, as he said, only to keep her company. Eleanor could not understand where all his strength came from.

Vance rang up one day and said she had the pictures. Before Eleanor could ask about them, Vance had hung up. Vance was

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coming over at once.

"You took a picture of a chair, dear! Does he look like a chair?" Vance asked, laughing. She handed Eleanor the photographs.

There were twelve photographs in the batch, but Eleanor looked only at the top two, which showed him seated in the straight chair and standing next to it. "Why, there he *is!*" she said triumphantly.

Vance hastily, but with a frown, looked at the two pictures again, then smiled broadly. "Are you implying there's something wrong with *my* eyes? It's only a chair, darling—an empty chair!"

Eleanor knew that Vance, speaking for herself, was right. Vance couldn't see him. For a moment Eleanor couldn't say anything.

"I told you what would happen. Um-m-m."

Eleanor knew he was behind her, in the doorway of the side room, though she did not turn to look at him.

"All right. Perhaps it's my eyes," Eleanor said. "But I *do* see him there!" She couldn't give up. Should she tell Vance about his Herculean feats in the attic? Could she have got a big heavy chest of drawers down the stairs by herself?

Vance stayed for a cup of tea. They talked of other things—everything to Eleanor was now "other" and a bit uninteresting and unimportant compared with him. Then Vance left, saying, "Promise me you'll go to Dr. Nimms next week. I'll drive you, if you don't want to drive. Maybe you shouldn't drive if your eyes are acting funny."

Eleanor had a car, but she seldom used it. She didn't care for driving. "Thanks, Vance, I'll go on my own." She meant it at that moment, but when Vance had gone, Eleanor knew she would not go to the eye doctor.

He sat with her while she ate dinner. She now felt defensive and protective about him. She no longer wanted to share him with anyone.

"You shouldn't have bothered with those photographs," he said. "You see, what I told you is true. Whatever I say is true."

And yet he didn't look brilliant or even especially intelligent, Eleanor reflected.

He tore a piece of bread rather savagely in half and stuffed one half into his mouth. "You're one of the very few people who can see me. Maybe only a dozen people in the whole world can see me. Maybe less than that. Why should the others see me?" he continued, and shrugged his chunky shoulders. "They're just like me."

"What do you mean?" she asked.

He sighed. "Ugly." Then he laughed softly and deeply. "I am

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not nice. Not nice at all."

She was too confused to answer for a moment. A polite answer seemed absurd. She was trying to think what he really meant.

"You enjoyed taking care of your mother, didn't you? You didn't mind it," he said, as if he were being polite himself and filling in an awkward silence.

"No, of course not. I loved her," Eleanor said readily. How could he know? Her father had died when she was 18, and she hadn't been able to finish college because of a shortage of money. Then her mother had become bedridden, but she had lived on for ten years. Her treatment had taken all the money Eleanor had been able to earn as a secretary, and a little more besides, so that everything of value they had possessed had finally been sold. Eleanor had married at 29, and gone with John to live in Boston. Oh, the gone and lovely days! John had been so kind, so understanding of the fact that she had been exhausted, in need of human company—or rather, the company of people her own age. Penny had been born when she was thirty.

"Yes, John was a good man, but not so good as you," he said, and sighed. "Um-m."

Now Eleanor laughed spontaneously. It was a relief from her thoughts. "How can one be good—or bad? Aren't we all a mixture? You're certainly not all bad."

This seemed to annoy him. "Don't tell me what I am."

Rebuffed, Eleanor said nothing more. She cleared the table.

She put him to bed, thanked him for his work in the garden that day—gouging up a thousand dandelions was no easy task. She was glad of his company in the house, even glad that no one else could see him. He was a funny doll that belonged to her. He made her feel odd, different, yet somehow special and privileged. She tried to put these thoughts from her mind, lest he disapprove of them, because he was looking, vaguely as usual, at her, with a resentment or a reproach. "Can I get you anything?" she asked.

"No," he answered shortly.

The next morning she found Bessie in the middle of the kitchen floor with her neck wrung. Her head sat in the strangest way on her neck, facing b a c k w a r d. Eleanor seized the corpse impulsively and pressed the cat to her breast. The head lolled. She knew he had done it. But why?

"Yes, I did it," his deep voice said.

She looked at the doorway, but did not see him. "How could you? Why did you do it?" Eleanor began to weep. The cat was not warm any longer, but she was not stiff.

"It's my nature." He did not

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laugh, but there was a smile in his voice. "You hate me now. You wonder if I'll be going. Yes, I'll be going." His voice was fading as he walked through the living room, but still she could not see him. "To prove it I'll slam the front door, but I don't need to use the door to get out." She heard the door slam.

She was looking at the front door. The door had not moved.

Eleanor buried Bessie in the back yard near the barn, and the pitchfork was heavy in her hands, and the earth heavier in her spade. She had waited until late afternoon, as if hoping that by some miracle Bessie might come alive again. But the cat's body had grown rigid. Eleanor wept again . . .

She declined Vance's next invitation to tea, and finally Vance came to see her, unexpectedly. Eleanor was sewing. She had quite a bit of work to do, but she was depressed and lonely, not knowing what she wanted, and there was no person she especially wanted to see. She realized that she missed him, that strange creature. And she knew he would never come back.

Vance was disappointed because Eleanor had not gone to see Dr. Nimms. She told Eleanor that she was neglecting herself. Eleanor did not enjoy seeing her old friend. Vance also remarked that Eleanor had lost weight.

"That—little monster isn't annoying you still, is he? Or is he?" Vance asked.

"He's gone," Eleanor said, and managed a smile, though what the smile meant she didn't know.

"How's Bessie?"

"Bessie—was killed by a car a couple of weeks ago."

"Oh, Eleanor! I'm sorry. Why didn't you—you should've *told* me! What bad luck! You'd better get another kitty. That's always the best thing to do. You're so fond of cats."

Eleanor shook her head a little.

"I'm going to find out where there's some nice kittens. The Carters' Siamese might've had another batch." Vance smiled. "They're always nice, half-Siamese. Really!"

That evening Eleanor ate no supper. She wandered through the empty-feeling rooms of her house, thinking not only of him, but of her lonely years here, and of the happier years here when John had been alive. He had tried to work in Millersville, ten miles away, but the job hadn't lasted. Or rather, the company hadn't lasted. That had been poor John's luck. No use thinking about it now, about what might have been if John had ever had a business of his own.

But now she thought more of when *he* had been here, the funny little fellow who had turned against her. She wished he were

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back. She felt he would not do such a horrid thing again, if she spoke to him the right way. He had become annoyed when she had said he was not entirely bad. But she knew he would not come back, not ever.

She worked until midnight. More letting out. More hems taken up. People were becoming square, she thought, but the thought did not make her smile any more. She looked at his photographs again, half expecting not to see him—like Vance; but he was still there, just as clear as he had been before. That was some comfort to her—but pictures were so flat and lifeless.

The house had never seemed so silent. Her plants were doing beautifully. Not long ago she had repotted most of them. Yet Eleanor sensed a negativity when she looked at them. It was very curious—a happy sight like blossoming plants causing sadness. She longed for something, and did not know what it was. That was strange also, this unidentifiable hunger, this loneliness that was worse and more profund than it was after John had died . . .

Tom Roland phoned one evening at 9:00 P.M. His wife was ill and he had to go at once to an "alert" at the Air Base. Could she come over and sit with his wife? He hoped to be home before midnight.

Eleanor went over at once, taking a bowl of fresh strawberries sprinkled with powdered sugar. Mary Roland was not seriously ill—it was a 24-hour virus attack of some kind; but she was grateful for the strawberries. The bowl was put on the bedtable. It was a pretty color to look at, though Mary could not eat anything just then.

Eleanor heard herself chatting as she always did, though in an odd way she felt she was not really present with Mary, not really even in the Rolands' house. It wasn't a "miles away" feeling, but a feeling that it was all not taking place. It was not even as real as a dream.

Eleanor went home at midnight, after Tom returned. Somehow she knew she was going to die that night. It was a calm and destined sensation. She might have died, she thought, if she had merely gone to bed and fallen asleep. But she wished to make sure of it, so she took a single-edged razor blade from her shelf of paints in the kitchen closet—the blade was rusty and dull, but no matter—and cut her two wrists at the basin in the bathroom.

The blood ran and ran, and she washed it down with running cold water, still mindful, she thought with slight amusement, of conserving the hot water in the tank. Finally, she could see that

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the streams were lessening. She took her bathtowel and wrapped it around both her wrists, winding her hands as if she were coiling wool. She was feeling weak, and she wanted to lie down and not soil the mattress, if possible.

The blood did not come through the towel before she lay down on her bed. Then she closed her eyes and did not know if the blood came through or not. It really did not matter, she supposed. Nor did the finished and unfinished skirts and dresses downstairs. People would come and claim them.

Eleanor thought of him, small and strong, strange and yet so plain and simple. He had never told her his name. She realized that she loved him.

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A little classic from THE FOUR MILLION*—about Soapy and Jack Frost's calling card and Soapy's annual tussle with the law—by one of the Old Masters and one of America's greatest taletellers . . .*

THE COP AND THE ANTHEM

by O. HENRY

ON HIS BENCH IN MADISON Square, Soapy moved uneasily. When wild geese honk high of nights, and when women without sealskin coats grow kind to their husbands, and when Soapy moves uneasily on his bench in the park, you may know that winter is near at hand.

A dead leaf fell in Soapy's lap. That was Jack Frost's card. Jack is kind to the regular denizens of Madison Square, and gives fair warning of his annual call. At the corners of four streets he hands his pasteboard to the North Wind, footman of the mansion of All Outdoors, so that the inhabitants thereof may make ready.

Soapy's mind became cognizant of the fact that the time had come for him to resolve himself into a singular Committee of Ways and Means to provide against the coming rigor. And therefore he moved uneasily on his bench.

The hibernatorial ambitions of Soapy were not of the highest. In them were no considerations of Mediterranean cruises, of soporific Southern skies or drifting in the Vesuvian Bay. Three months on the Island was what his soul craved. Three months of assured board and bed and congenial company, safe from Boreas and bluecoats, seemed to Soapy the very essence of things desirable.

For years the hospitable Blackwell's had been his winter quarters. Just as his more fortunate fellow New Yorkers had bought their tickets to Palm Beach and the Riviera each winter, so Soapy had made his humble arrangements for his annual hegira to the Island. And now the time had come. On the previous night three Sabbath newspapers, distributed beneath his coat, about his ankles and over his lap, had failed to repulse the cold as he slept on his bench near the spurting fountain in the ancient square.

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So the Island loomed big and timely in Soapy's mind.

He scorned the provisions made in the name of charity for the city's dependents. In Soapy's opinion the Law was more benign than Philanthropy. There was an endless round of institutions, municipal and eleemosynary, on which he might set out and received lodging and food accordant with the simple life. But to one of Soapy's proud spirit the gifts of charity are encumbered. If not in coin you must pay in humiliation of spirit for every benefit received at the hands of philanthropy. As Caesar had his Brutus, every bed of charity must have its toll of a bath, every loaf of bread its compensation of a private and personal inquisition. Wherefore it is better to be a guest of the law, which, though conducted by rules, does not meddle unduly with a gentleman's private affairs.

Soapy, having decided to go to the Island, at once set about accomplishing his desire. There were many easy ways of doing this. The pleasantest was to dine luxuriously at some expensive restaurant; and then after declaring insolvency, be handed over quietly and without uproar to a policeman. An accomodating magistrate would do the rest.

Soapy left his bench and strolled out of the square and across the level sea of asphalt, where Broadway and Fifth Avenue flow together. Up Broadway he turned, and halted at a glittering café, where are gathered together nightly the choicest products of the grape, the silkworm, and the protoplasm.

Soapy had confidence in himself from the lowest button of his vest upward. He was shaven, and his coat was decent and his neat, black, ready-tied four-in-hand had been presented to him by a lady missionary on Thanksgiving Day. If he could reach a table in the restaurant unsuspected, success would be his. The portion of him that would show above the table would raise no doubt in the waiter's mind.

A roasted mallard duck, thought Soapy, would be about the thing—with a bottle of Chablis, and then Camembert, a demitasse, and a cigar. One dollar for the cigar would be enough. The total would not be so high as to call forth any supreme manifestation of revenge from the café management; and yet the meal would leave him filled and happy for the annual journey to his winter refuge.

But as Soapy set foot inside the restaurant door the head-waiter's eye fell upon his frayed trousers and decadent shoes. Strong and ready hands turned him about and conveyed him in silence and haste to the sidewalk and averted the ignoble fate of

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the menaced roasted mallard.

Soapy turned off Broadway. It seemed that his route to the coveted Island was not to be an epicurean one. Some other way of entering limbo must be thought of.

At a corner of Sixth Avenue, electric lights and cunningly displayed wares behind plate-glass made a shop window conspicuous. Soapy took a cobblestone and dashed it through the glass. People came running around the corner, a policeman in the lead. Soapy stood still, with his hands in his pockets, and smiled at the sight of shining brass buttons.

"Where's the man that done that?" inquired the officer excitedly.

"Don't you figure out that I might have had something to do with it?" said Soapy, not without sarcasm, but friendly, as one greets good fortune.

The policeman's mind refused to accept Soapy even as a clue. Men who smash windows do not remain to parley with the law's minions. They take to their heels. The policeman saw a man halfway down the block running to catch a car. With drawn club he joined in the pursuit. Soapy, with disgust in his heart, loafed along. Twice he had been unsuccessful.

On the opposite side of the street was a restaurant of no great pretensions. It catered to large appetites and modest purses. Its crockery and atmosphere were thick; its soup and napery thin. Into this place Soapy took his accusive shoes and telltale trousers without challenge. At a table he sat and consumed beefsteak, flapjacks, doughnuts, and pie. And then to the waiter he betrayed the fact that the minutest coin and himself were strangers.

"Now, get busy and call a cop," said Soapy. "And don't keep a gentleman waiting."

"No cop for youse," said the waiter, with a voice like butter cakes and an eye like the cherry in a Manhattan cocktail. "Hey, Con!"

Neatly upon his left ear on the callous pavement two waiters pitched Soapy. He arose joint by joint, as a carpenter's rule opens, and beat the dust from his clothes. Arrest seemed but a rosy dream. The Island seemed very far away. A policeman who stood before a drug store two doors away laughed and walked down the street.

Five blocks Soapy traveled before his courage permitted him to woo capture again. This time the opportunity presented what he fatuously termed to himself a "cinch." A young woman of a modest and pleasing guise was standing before a show window gazing with sprightly interest at its display of shaving mugs and inkstands, and two yards from the

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window a large policeman of severe demeanor leaned against a water plug.

It was Soapy's design to assume the role of the despicable and execrated "masher." The refined and elegant appearance of his victim and the contiguity of the conscientious cop encouraged him to believe that he would soon feel the pleasant official clutch upon his arm that would insure his winter quarters on the right little, tight little isle.

Soapy straightened the lady missionary's ready-made tie, dragged his shrinking cuffs into the open, set his hat at a killing cant, and sidled toward the young woman. He made eyes at her, was taken with sudden coughs and "hems," smiled, smirked, and went brazenly through the impudent and contemptible litany of the "masher." With half an eye Soapy saw that the policeman was watching him fixedly. The young woman moved away a few steps, and again bestowed her absorbed attention upon the shaving mugs.

Soapy followed, boldly stepping to her side, raised his hat, and said, "Ah, there, Bedelia! Don't you want to come and play in my yard?"

The policeman was still looking. The persecuted young woman had but to beckon a finger and Soapy would be practically en route for his insular haven. Already he imagined he could feel the cozy warmth of the station-house. The young woman faced him, and stretching out a hand, quickly caught Soapy's coat sleeve.

"Sure, Mike," she said, joyfully, "if you'll blow me to a pail of suds. I'd have spoke to you sooner, but the cop was watching."

With the young woman playing the clinging ivy to his oak, Soapy walked past the policeman overcome with gloom. He seemed doomed to liberty.

At the next corner he shook off his companion and ran. He halted in the district where by night are found the lightest streets, hearts, vows, and librettos. Women in furs and men in greatcoats moved gaily in the wintry air. A sudden fear seized Soapy that some dreadful enchantment had rendered him immune to arrest. The thought brought a little panic, and when he came upon another policeman lounging grandly in front of a transplendent theater he caught at the immediate straw of "disorderly conduct."

On the sidewalk Soapy began to yell drunken gibberish at the top of his harsh voice. He danced, howled, raved, and otherwise disturbed the welkin.

The policeman twirled his club, turned his back to Soapy, and remarked to a citizen.

"'Tis one of them Yale lads celebratin' the goose egg they give

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to the Hartford College. Noisy; but no harm. We've instructions to leave them be."

Disconsolate, Soapy ceased his unavailing racket. Would never a policeman lay hands on him? In this fancy the Island seemed an unattainable Arcadia. He buttoned his thin coat against the raw chilling wind.

In a cigar store he saw a well-dressed man lighting a cigar at a swinging light. His silk umbrella he had set by the door on entering. Soapy stepped inside, secured the umbrella, and sauntered off with it slowly. The man at the cigar light followed hastily.

"My umbrella," he said in a stern voice.

"Oh, is it?" sneered Soapy, adding insult to petit larceny. "Well, why don't you call a policeman? I took it. Your umbrella! Why don't you call a cop? There's one on the corner."

The umbrella owner slowed his steps. Soapy did likewise, with a presentiment that luck would again run against him. The policeman looked at them curiously.

"Of course," said the umbrella man, "that is—well, you know how these mistakes occur—I—if it's your umbrella I hope you'll excuse me—I picked it up this morning in a restaurant—if you recognize it as yours, why—I hope you'll—"

"Of course it's mine," said Soapy viciously.

The ex-umbrella man retreated. The policeman hurried to assist a tall blonde in an opera cloak across the street in front of a street car that was approaching two blocks away.

Soapy walked eastward through a street damaged by improvements. He hurled the umbrella wrathfully into an excavation. He muttered against the men who wear helmets and carry clubs. Because he wanted to fall into their clutches, they seemed to regard him as a king who could do no wrong.

At length Soapy reached one of the avenues to the east where the glitter and turmoil was but faint. He started down this toward Madison Square, for the homing instinct survives even when the home is a park bench.

But on an unusually quiet corner Soapy came to a standstill. Here was an old church, quaint and rambling and gabled. Through one violet-stained window a soft light glowed where, no doubt, the organist loitered over the keys, making sure of his mastery of the coming Sabbath anthem. For there drifted out to Soapy's ears sweet music that caught and held him transfixed against the convolutions of the iron fence.

The moon was above, lustrous and serene; vehicles and pedestrians were few; sparrows twittered sleepily in the eaves—for a little while the scene

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might have been a country churchyard. And the anthem that the organist played cemented Soapy to the iron fence, for he had known it well in the days when his life contained such things as mothers and roses and ambitions and friends and immaculate collars.

The conjunction of Soapy's receptive state of mind and the influences about the old church wrought a sudden and wonderful change in his soul. He viewed with swift horror the pit into which he had tumbled, the degraded days, unworthy faculties, and base motives that made up his existence.

And also in a moment his heart responded thrillingly to this novel mood. An instantaneous and strong impulse moved him to battle with his desperate fate. He would pull himself out of the mire; he would make a man of himself again; he would conquer the evil that had taken possession of him. There was time; he was comparatively young yet; he would resurrect his old eager ambitions and pursue them without faltering. Those solemn but sweet organ notes had set up a revolution in him.

Tomorrow he would go into the roaring downtown district and find work. A fur importer had once offered him a place as a driver. He would find him tomorrow and ask for the position. He would be somebody in the world. He would—

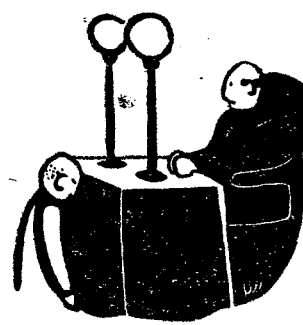
Soapy felt a hand laid on his arm. He looked quickly around into the face of a policeman.

"What are you doin' here?" asked the officer.

"Nothin'," said Soapy.

"Then come along," said the policeman.

"Three months on the Island," said the Magistrate in the Police Court the next morning.



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BEST MYSTERIES OF THE MONTH

recommended by JOHN DICKSON CARR

Once more, mysteriously, the prayed-for has happened, with first-class new books in plenty. We are to consider two detective novels of classic pattern, one sensational mystery-adventure, and one how-can-he-escape dilemma of the sort which might entrap any decent man in this mixed-up society. Next month I shall have news which I hope you will find good news; meanwhile, let me stop pontificating and get down to business.

Murder to go, by Emma Lathen (Simon and Schuster, $4.95), as always in this author's work, combines a sound, ingenious detective problem with social comment always witty, sometimes scathing. The Sloan Guaranty Trust, of which our old friend John Putnam Thatcher is senior vice-president, has put up twelve million dollars to back Frank Hedstorm's chain of take-out restaurants, Chicken Tonight. When some unknown hand introduces poison into their food, the plight of Chicken Tonight has grown more than embarrassing; our banker-detective must don his deer-stalker hat and mingle in the backstage battles of this warring outfit.

"Chickens?" exclaims much-married Tom Robichaux. "Well, that's one helluva way to make big money!" It is also one helluva murder plot, amid credible characters at each other's throats. The poisoner turns strangler; a situation already emotional soars towards hysteria before Thatcher maneuvers the wiliest of murderers into public betrayal. If Chicken Tonight boasts forty-odd ways of preparing its product, there are forty-odd ways in which this admirable story might be praised.

In *The Stately Home Murder,* by Catherine Aird (Crime Club, $4.50), the country seat of the thirteenth Earl of Ornum—complete with gentlemanly librarian, gentlemanly steward, eccentric family, and ultra-respectable servants—has been opened to the public three days weekly at two and six a head.

We know, of course, that any stately home of England will no more lack its new corpse than it will lack its old ghost. Nor are we disappointed; they duly appear. If at times the action seems inspired less by Agatha Christie than by P. G. Wodehouse (Miss

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Aird's comedy is excellent, don't let this fool you. With two brutal murders, suspicion constantly flickering, and some shrewd police work by Inspector Sloan, the author takes high place among those homicidal ladies as skilled at plotting as they are smooth of prose.

He must be dead and buriable who would not enjoy this one. Inspector Sloan calls it a traditional story, pointing out the traditional end. But it is the right sort of tradition, which the stately Holmes of England himself would thoroughly approve.

The Spoilers, by Desmond Bagley (Doubleday, $5.95) must never be confused with a famous old novel of the same title. This present tale, very much of our own time, opens in London and then shifts to the Middle East for as spectacular an adventure saga as you are likely to encounter. When the daughter of Sir Robert Hellier, millionaire film magnate, lies dead from an overdose of heroin in her sleazy lodging-house, her father vows vengeance against those who have driven her there. To Dr. Nicholas Warren, a sympathetic physician with knowledge of addicts' problems and some inside information as well, he offers the resources of his financial empire if Dr. Warren will gather up a team to do battle.

Their purpose? No less ambitious than to smash the whole international ring which has been supplying two continents with drugs. Their picturesque team includes an ex-Army major for hire, an American con man, a former torpedo expert of the Royal Navy, a psychologist, and a newspaper reporter. Moving out to Teheran and Beirut, the team splits into two teams with explosions all the way. As for the deadly characters they meet, Killer Eastman is bad enough, but for sheer ruthlessness he can't match Jeanette Delorme, the sensual, cold-blooded female spider who first cohabits and then devours. Some fine action scenes on the desert lead to a fantastic sea battle in which Warren's team quite literally sinks the enemy. If you enjoy sensational dirty work, you can't do better than *The Spoilers*.

There is too little space left properly to discuss J. E. Brown's *Incident at 125th Street* (Doubleday, $4.95). But you yourself, from no fault of your own, might find yourself in the position of David Martin, who faces prison and the wreck of his life because innate human decency has sent him to the help of an old man being mugged. Martin's last-moment rescue, through the innate human decency of two or three others, makes both for a trenchant comment on New York *mores* and for a gripping novel you won't be able to put down.

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a *NEW* crime story by

BERKELY MATHER

Reg Carter, owner of a small, poor-paying farm, isolated and on the edge of a lonely moor, had nothing but contempt for his wife, Ella. He considered her sniveling, spineless, helpless, and of no use whatever to a harassed, struggling farmer. But Reg Carter had obviously never heard of the old saying—never underestimate and so on . . .

TERROR RIDE

by BERKELY MATHER

REG CARTER SAID, "SEVENTY acres. Too much for one man to work, not enough for two. Six inches of topsoil and it slopes the wrong way. Eight miles from the nearest village and perched on the edge of the moor. I'm going to sell the damned place."

"Yes, dear," said Ella dutifully.

"Sure, you'd like that, wouldn't you," snarled Reg. "Well, I'm *not* going to sell—see?"

"No, dear," said Ella.

"Can't you say anything but bloody 'yes, dear and no, dear'?" demanded Reg; but she'd fallen into that trap before, so now she said nothing. She just refilled his cup of tea from the brownstone pot and moved the marmalade a tentative inch closer to him, and brushed an incipient tear from the corner of her eye with the back of her hand.

He gulped down the tea, scalded his mouth, cursed, and jumped to his feet. At the kitchen door he turned and scowled at her, and said in tones of deepest contempt, "That's right, snivel! No guts—that's your trouble."

She sat, shoulders drooped and hands folded limply in her lap, sniffling miserably until she heard the truck being coaxed into reluctant life in the shed across the farmyard, sputtering jerkily because of the trouble the starter always gave and which he was constantly swearing he was going to

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fix once and for all with a sledge-hammer. She got up and went out into the soft but steady rain. He backed the truck out of the shed, swung around, and headed for the road, gunning the motor impatiently. She pattered through the mud and opened the gate.

"When will you be back, dear?" she asked timidly.

"How the hell do I know?" he shouted above the roar of the engine. "Six o'clock, seven o'clock or maybe eight. What difference does it make? It's market day—or had you forgotten that too?" He drove through, stopped, and added, "And shut the gate this time or you'll have the sheep in the bloody vegetables again."

She went back into the kitchen and took a cigarette from the pack she kept hidden behind the flour bin. He didn't like to see her smoke. It wasn't "farmer's-wifely," he said. She shivered and stood looking down at the glowing stove. Three years of it, she reflected. How much more could she take? She'd have left him long ago had it not been for Louise. Or would she?

He still had his good moments, when things were going reasonably well with the small, ill-paying farm—moments which if not exactly tender were at least amiable. She remembered their earlier days here, when he had given up his job in the land surveyor's office and put his savings and a small legacy from his mother into the farm. The work had been desperately hard but their hopes had been high and they had been happy. But now these recurring moods of his—

The waking whimpering of the baby in the bedroom above brought her back to the present. She dragged out the bathtub and spread towels on the rug in front of the stove, then poured hot water from the blackened iron kettle, added cold and tested it carefully with her bared elbow. She went up the narrow stairs and lifted the baby from her cradle, crooning over her and burying her face in the soft warmth of her woolly night clothes. The whimpering stopped and the baby crowed contentedly.

Ella undressed her and lowered her gently into the water, and then there was a knock at the door. She looked round, surprised. The mailman was not due for an hour yet.

"Come in," she called. "It's not locked."

The door opened and two men entered, carefully closing it behind them. The one in the lead was short and tubby, with a round cherubic face and graying hair plastered flat with the rain. The other was tall and angular, younger, but with a deeply lined face and mean little eyes that didn't seem to focus properly. The older man was dressed in the

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mudstained ruins of what had once been a smart city suit; the other, more serviceably in jeans and a leather coat. The older man beamed at her delightedly.

"My dear!" he gushed. "What a picture of maternal beatitude. Would that I had the brush of a Rembrandt or a Botticelli." His voice was rich and plumy.

"I'm sorry," said Ella, confused. "My husband has just gone—"

"To market—like the little piggy in the nursery rhyme, while t'other one stayed at home," supplied the man. "So we heard from our hiding place behind the shed." He sniffed ecstatically, his nostrils flaring. "Bacon? Do I smell bacon? Of your gentle charity, dear lady, just a dozen rashers, crisp but not frizzled, with four gloriously fresh farm eggs on top—*each.*"

He yelped as the other man pushed past him and grabbed a piece of toast from the table. "Mind my wrist, you clumsy clod!" he swore, and Ella saw for the first time the handcuffs that linked the older man's right wrist to the other's left. "Forgive my language, my dear," he went on. "This fellow is a trial. An average prison population of thirty-seven thousand, so the statistics say, and unkind Fate has to pair me with this moron."

Ella had risen from her knees beside the bathtub and had wrapped the baby in a towel. Her eyes slid sideways toward the door. The older man smiled gently, chidingly, at her and waggled a finger of his free left hand.

"Ah, no, my dear," he admonished. "It would be highly inadvisable to take the little darling from a warm bath out into the cold rain. Give her to me." He held out his left arm. Ella backed away quickly, her eyes widening. The thin man lurched forward and gripped her by the arm, hard. Ella bit back a moan and clutched the baby tighter.

"Do as you're told, stupid," he snarled. "Unless you want to get hurt."

"Please—please—" whispered Ella. "Let me put her back in her cradle upstairs. I'll get you anything you want then—food—"

"Of course you will," cooed the older man. "Could a mother's heart be anything but compassionate? But I'll take little ducksie-wucksie." He eased the baby away from her. "And now get on with the breakfast. *I* have the patience of a saint, but I fear for my friend."

He lowered his voice confidentially. "His fourth conviction for grievous bodily harm, you know. He's in—*was* in—for fourteen years." He smiled gently and backed away to a rocking chair by the stove, drawing the thin man with him. The baby started to wriggle, and then to wail. He

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made soothing noises and pulled the other man's arm toward him as he wrapped the towel more comfortably about her.

Ella stood looking at them in an agony of indecision. The thin man snarled again like a vicious animal and raised his free right arm threateningly. Ella hurriedly got bacon and a bowl of eggs from a shelf by the window, poked up the fire, and put on a big frying pan. The baby's wailing had ceased for the moment and she lay in the crook of the older man's arm, looking up at him with wide eyes.

"*That's* better," he said with deep satisfaction. "Dogs and children—they take to Uncle Robert like magic." He looked up at the clock on the mantelpiece. "The news," he said. "Make a long arm for the radio, Grotters."

The other man reached out to the old-fashioned set on a side table and switched on the radio. A burst of pop music filled the room. "Not that, you idiot," said his companion.

The other made adjustments of the dial and an announcer's voice came up: "—as the motor coach conveying them from the Ilchester Assizes skidded off the road and overturned. The thirty convicts, who were being taken to the County Gaol after sentence, were linked in pairs by handcuffs. Six pairs made a break, but five have been recaptured. The remaining pair is still at large. They are Robert Finsome, sentenced to five years for false pretenses, and Thomas Grottersley, sentenced to fourteen years for robbery with violence and grievous bodily harm. The public are particularly warned of the latter. He is described as being a man of enormous physical strength but of very low mentality and—"

The thin man swore filthily and switched off.

"Oh, come now," chuckled the other. "You mustn't be oversensitive, Grotters. We can't *all* be members of the criminal intelligentsia. Anyhow, that enormous physical strength of yours is going to be useful in removing this wretched jewelry from our lily-white wrists."

"Shut your damn mouth," Grotersley said savagely, and added to Ella, "Get a move on with that grub, you."

Half an hour later, fed and replete, they sat in front of the fire on adjoining chairs, the baby in a carry-cot beside them, while Ella prepared the baby's food in a saucepan.

Finsome said, "And now, my dear, let us discuss tactics. Who normally calls here during the day?"

"Only the postman," she answered dully. "He's due about now." She glanced over her shoulder at the window through which could be seen a stretch of

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the lonely moorland road, running arrow-straight for half a mile until it disappeared into a dip between the low surrounding hills. Finsome stood up and peered out through the driving rain.

"Admirably sited," he said approvingly. "It couldn't be better. And how does the postman actually deliver your mail?"

"He drives the post-office truck," she answered. "He usually comes in here for a cup of tea."

Grottersley leered meaningfully at her, and Finsome regarded him with disapproval.

"Really, Grotters," he said severely. "That's most uncalled for." He turned to Ella. "At the same time, my dear, that's the way this cynical old world is inclined to jump to conclusions. Especially in regard to such a young and pretty woman as yourself—and in such a lonely place."

"My husband is always here," she said, flushing. "Well, most days."

"But not *this* day," said Finsome. "You must discourage the postman, kindly but firmly, and in a manner not likely to arouse his suspicions. Do you understand?"

"She'd better understand, unless she wants a belt on the ear," growled Grottersley. "Make him shove the letters under the door, and tell him to buzz off. Tell him your old man's suspicious, and he's looking for him with a pitchfork. And make it real convincing, because we'll be holding the baby—out of sight."

"No—please—" she gasped. "Don't take her out of the kitchen. I promise you I won't say anything to him."

"Of course you won't," Finsome said soothingly. "We trust you implicitly. But there's no need for you to be as coarse as my friend has suggested. Tell him you're just about to give the baby a bath."

Grottersley looked past him through the window. "Here he is now," he said tensely. Down the rainswept road a red truck had appeared. Finsome picked up the carry-cot and made for the stairs, but Grottersley held him back.

"There's two of 'em," he said, pointing. "Look—the other's a cop. You can see his helmet through the windshield. The pig!"

The truck rolled up to the gate and stopped, and two figures in oilskins got out. Finsome passed the carry-cot to Grottersley, awkwardly by its twin handles, nearly dropping the baby onto the stone floor. He shouldered the frantic Ella to one side and shot the bolt on the kitchen door.

"Watch it!" he whispered. "I'm warning you. Grottersley is holding the baby. Fourteen years—life—what's the difference? Don't try anything."

They went quickly through the

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door leading to the stairs. There was a peremptory rap at the other door.

"Sorry, Arthur," Ella called shakily. "You can't come in. I'm—I'm just going to give the baby a bath."

"Two of us here," said the mailman. "I've got the Law with me."

"Sergeant Hunt, Mrs. Carter," said another, more formal, voice. "Just doing the rounds of the outlying farms. There's a couple of escaped prisoners on the run. You may have heard it on the radio—"

"I did," she said breathlessly.

"Nothing to worry about really. They wouldn't be fools enough to make for the moors in this weather," the policeman went on. "But it's best to be on the safe side. Keep your eyes open for any strangers hanging around, and warn Mr. Carter to do the same. If you do see anybody you don't recognize, get the station on the phone immediately. All right?"

"I'll do that," she answered, and some letters slid in under the door.

"Three bills and a circular," said the mailman. "Read 'em myself on the way up. So long."

"So long," Ella replied. She leaned against the door, her knees shaking under her. Squelching footsteps receded on the other side, then came the sound of the motor starting up, and the truck bumped slowly along the rutted farm road.

The two men came back into the kitchen. The baby, hungry, had started to wail complainingly. Ella flew at them and snatched the carry-cot from Grottersley, her eyes blazing hate. Finsome beamed.

"Splendid, my dear," he said enthusiastically. "A perfect performance. Now, a mite more of your willing cooperation and we'll be on our way. Tools—we need tools. Anything your husband has in the way of strong metal shears, files, that sort of thing—"

But she wasn't listening. She had the carry-cot beside her on a chair and she was once more heating the baby's food. Grottersley stepped up to her and gripped her arm cruelly. She winced, but continued to stir the contents of the saucepan.

"We're talking to you, beautiful," he said. "Pay attention."

"They're in the shed outside," she told him.

"Well, go and get 'em." He started to push her toward the door, but she shook free and returned to her task. He swung, backhanded, knocking her across the room. She came hard up against the wall and slid down onto her knees. A thin trickle of blood appeared at the corner of her mouth. Finsome tut-tutted reproachfully.

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"There's no need for that sort of thing—we hope," he said. "Run along and get them, there's a good girl."

She dragged herself to her feet, shaking her head slowly from side to side as if to clear it.

"The baby," she mumbled. "Let me take her with me. I'm not leaving her with—with him—"

"Now that's silly, isn't it?" Finsome chided her. *"I'll* look after the baby. Off you go. Hurry, dear, for your own sake. The sooner we're rid of these things, the sooner we'll be gone."

She hesitated a moment longer. Grottersley stepped toward her. She moved to the door, stifling a sob, and slid back the bolt and went out. The men moved to where they could keep her in view. They could see her in the open-fronted shed groping round the shelves inside and collecting what she found in a gunny sack.

She returned to them and Grottersley grabbed the sack and tipped the contents onto the floor. Ella went back to the stove. She wiped the blood from her mouth with her apron and taste-tested the heat of the food, then knelt beside the baby, coaxing her with the spoon.

"Pliers, two wrenches, a hammer, a bloody blunt saw, and two wood files," Grottersley raged at her. "Do you mean to say this is all you've got?"

"Not very promising," gloomed Finsome. "Are you sure there's nothing more there?" he asked over his shoulder.

"That's the lot," she said listlessly.

They toiled for over an hour, ruining the saw and rubbing the files smooth without any noticeable effect on the tough steel of the chain connecting the two handcuffs.

"Give us the hammer," Grottersley said at last. "You can spring the lock sometimes, if you know where to hit."

They laid their wrists together on the hearthstone.

"Careful," quavered Finsome anxiously.

Grottersley struck a half dozen cautious blows on his own handcuff without success, then turned the heavy hammer onto that of Finsome's, with considerably more force. The fourth blow glanced off the steel and there was a spurt of blood from the older man's wrist. He bellowed and overbalanced, writhing on the floor in agony, and pulling Grottersley over with him.

Ella, nursing the baby to sleep in the rocker, slipped her quickly into the carry-cot and dove for the hammer, but Grottersley had regained his feet. He kicked her, catching her in the ribs. She gasped and tried to rise. He kicked again, harder, and she collapsed and lay still . . .

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Reg Carter stopped at the gate and sounded the horn. Through the rain he could see the warm glow of the lamp in the kitchen window, but there was no answering movement inside. He sounded the horn again, waited, then got out, cursing, and opened the gate himself.

He drove through and garaged the truck in the shed, then gathered up some bundles and plowed through the mud to the kitchen door. He opened it and went in, shaking water from himself like a wet poodle.

"Why the hell didn't you open the gate for me?" he yelled angrily. Then a stone pickling jar hit his skull and he went down like a log. Grottersley grabbed him by the collar and pulled him across the kitchen and up the stairs, Finsome, his injured hand bound in a bloodstained towel, walking beside them, whimpering and moaning.

They went into the bedroom. Ella, trussed and gagged on the bed, turned the whites of her eyes toward them. One-handed, Grottersley heaved Reg's inert body onto the bed beside her.

"Company for you," he grunted. "He ain't dead. The jerk ought to be—keeping a stinking set of tools like that around the house." He took the loose end of the clothesline that was binding Ella, and with his right hand and Finsome's left they managed to tie Carter securely. Then they returned downstairs. Grottersley dowsed the oil lamp and they went out to the truck. He opened the door on the passenger's side and grunted, "Get in first and move over to the wheel. What the hell are you waiting for?"

"How on earth do you expect *me* to drive?" snuffled Finsome. "One hand injured and the other shackled to you."

"You'll have to manage, Come on, get a move on. We haven't got all night."

"But I can't, you fool!" howled Finsome. "Don't you see—if I'm on the right our linked hands will be crossing in front of us. If you're behind the wheel our linked hands will be between us, and we can move the gearshift together—"

"But I can't drive," Grottersley told him, and the older man stared at him in dismay.

"You—you mean you don't know *how* to drive?" he gasped.

" 'S'right. Never had the chance to learn," Grottersley mumbled. "In stir when most kids of my age was getting their licenses—and I been in and out ever since. You know what it's like—"

"Oh, my God," moaned Finsome. "What a time to tell me this." He thought for some moments, then said, "Only one thing for it. The girl will have to drive."

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"What if she makes a squawk, or jumps out or something when we get into traffic?" questioned Grottersley doubtfully.

"She won't—not if we've got the brat in the back with us," Finsome said positively, and the other gaped at him admiringly.

"Why the hell didn't we think of that in the first place?" he said. "Come on, let's get her."

They hurried back through the darkness, into the house and up the stairs.

"A little drive for you," Finsome explained as Grottersley untied her bonds. "And baby comes too—and nothing will happen to her as long as you behave sensibly."

She was screaming incoherently even as Grottersly untied the silk stocking that was gagging her. "I won't—I won't, I tell you!"

Grottersley slapped her hard across the face. "All right then, stay here. But the kid goes with us, see?"

She rolled to the edge of the bed and tottered to her feet, biting back a moan as the circulation started again in her cramped limbs.

Five minutes later they were in the truck, Ella in front behind the wheel and the men in the back, with the baby warmly wrapped in everything woolen that Ella could find, crying complainingly in the carry-cot between them.

"Shove something over her mouth, for God's sake," Finsome said irritably and Ella screamed again.

"No—no—you'll smother her," she cried out. "Let her ride in front with me—I'll keep her quiet—"

"Get on with it or I'll go to work on her," Grottersley threatened.

The faulty starter jammed and under her inexpert directions they had to climb out again and rock the truck into second gear to free it. The motor started finally and she backed out, swung around, and headed for the gate.

"You'll have to get out and open it," she shouted to them. "If I take my foot off she'll stall."

Raging and cursing they climbed over the tailboard again, but they took the carry-cot with them, and her half-formed plan to make a dash for it was stillborn.

"We're going to Portsmouth," Finsome told her as they climbed in again. "There's an all-night diner there called Jack's Snackery, just outside town."

"Portsmouth?" she gasped. "But that's over a hundred miles away."

"Then you'd better step on it," Grottersley said. "And listen—if we're stopped tell 'em your old man has had an accident and you're going for the doctor."

"That might send them to the farm," Finsome said. "No—a sick

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animal. You're going to the vet for some medicine."

A light swung slowly from side to side signaling them to halt as they turned onto the main road six miles farther on. Grottersley, on his knees behind her, chattered with terror. Finsome pulled him down beside him onto the floor of the truck, under some empty wheat sacks.

"Tell them," he ground out. "And make it convincing. I'm warning you—if they look inside the kid's done for."

It was the police, but represented only by a very wet Sergeant Hunt. He came up to the truck and raised his lamp.

"Oh, it's you, Mrs. Carter?" he said, surprised.

"Don't stop me," she begged. "The stud ewe—sick. Medicine from the vet. My husband is sitting up with her—"

He stepped back and waved her on. From the back came vague noises of approval and relief as the truck sped down the main road.

"Keep it like that," Grottersley said, "and nobody's going to get hurt."

But ten miles farther on she fumbled a gear change; the truck stalled and the starter jammed again. She put it into reverse and let it run backward down the rear slope, slipping her clutch as she had seen her husband do; but she misjudged and the rear wheels finished in the roadside ditch.

Screaming obscenely, the men got out, taking the carry-cot with them and putting it over the hedge into a field; but nothing they could do would rock the starter free this time. The rain was coming down in a solid sheet now, and Ella was sobbing frantically. "The baby! The baby! She'll catch her death of cold! Please—please put her back inside. I'll do anything—anything—"

"Then *do* it!" Grottersley shouted, punching her hard.

She remembered then in her extremity. "It's a thing called the bendix drive," she said. "My husband puts a screwdriver in and pushes against something and—"

"Don't talk about it! Get on with it!" yelled Finsome.

She fumbled in the toolbox and ran round to the front of the truck and raised the heavy, rear-hinged hood, propping it up on its strut. She made ineffectual jabs at the flywheel casing—and then, like a blinding flash of light, the idea came to her. She straightened and turned to the two men crowding close in on her.

"It's no good," she said. "My hand's not strong enough. I'll show you where it is. If one of you—"

"Give me the bloody thing," snarled Grottersley, and snatched the screwdriver from her.

"There," pointed out Ella. She guided his free right hand down

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into the dark cavern of the engine space. "If you'll hold it—"

She jumped back, sweeping the strut away, and the heavy hood clanged down, and her whole weight was on it, and Grottersley was screaming and trying to push her away with his other hand; but Finsome was shackled to that one, and he wasn't cooperating—and the night was being split with their concerted howls of pain when the police car swept up . . .

Ella was crooning over the baby in the back seat of the police car. In front a policeman was talking into a microphone.

"The woman and the baby are all right, but one of the blokes has got his hand just about chopped off, and the other seems to have gone nuts. Hurry with that ambulance. Over."

"There, there, my precious," whispered Ella. *"Silly* men shouting and making all that fuss about nothing—and frightening Mummy's little darling."

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He'd been accused of his wife's murder and arrested, but the grand jury had considered the evidence insufficient and had refused to indict. That should have been the end of it. But, more than a year later, the anonymous phone calls began . . .

AFTER THE FACT

by ROBERT EDWARD ECKELS

THE PHONE CALLS STARTED shortly after Irene and I returned from our wedding trip. We'd been away over a year. You'd think that would be time enough for people to forget the scandal of my first wife's murder and my subsequent arrest and release. But someone remembered. Someone with a reason to remember.

I waited long enough for a pattern to develop, then I did something that after my previous experience I swore I'd never do. I got in touch with the police. Anyone who's been on the wrong end of a police investigation is chary of getting involved with them again. And I in particular wasn't certain of the kind of response I'd get. They'd worked hard to prove me guilty of my first wife's murder, and I wasn't sure that even now they'd entirely accepted the idea of my innocence. Even so, I didn't expect what happened.

They sent out Riegeler, the man who had arrested me and who had worked hardest to get me hanged.

He stood in the doorway, smiling self-consciously before my astonished stare. He wasn't a tall man, but he had powerful shoulders and the large dangling hands you often see on professional baseball players. In the weeks and months following my first wife's murder I had come to dread the sight of those hands.

"You!" The word burst out of me like a bomb.

"It had to be someone," Riegeler said almost apologetically.

"Yes," I said, recovering myself. "But *you*."

"Yeah," Riegeler said. "I know what you mean." He bit his lip and glanced sideways down the street. In the next yard a woman was cutting flowers from her garden and farther down a man was following a power mower around the edges of his lawn. "Look,"

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Riegeler went on, "can we talk about this inside?"

Silently I stepped aside and held the door wide for him to enter. Once inside he took off his hat and held it awkwardly in his huge hands.

"Like I say," he said, "I know how you feel. And if you want to you can call the precinct and they'll put another man on the case. But I hope you don't. Because, to tell the truth, I asked for this assignment. The lieutenant didn't want to give it to me, but I talked him into it."

"In heaven's name, man," I said, more astonished than ever, "why?"

Riegeler shrugged diffidently. "Maybe to show that there was nothing personal the time before, that I was just doing the job they pay me for."

"I see," I said. Privately I thought that Riegeler had shown a little too much dedication to his job. But perhaps that dedication would work to my advantage now. I smiled wryly and said, "That's the first hopeful sign I've had that anyone in this town is willing to let the past die."

I led him back to the oak-paneled room that served as my study. Riegeler pursed his lips as he looked over the furnishings.

"Nice," he said.

"I like nice things," I said.

"Who doesn't?" he said. He took another long look around the room, then sighed. "They told me down at the precinct that you were having some trouble with phone calls."

"That's right," I said. I sat down behind the huge desk that dominated the room and nodded toward another, smaller chair. Riegeler sat down gingerly on its edge. I felt a small private glow of satisfaction from the fact that our relative positions were almost exactly reversed from our last meeting. Then we had been on Riegeler's home ground and I had sat tensely before him while he questioned me.

Now he cleared his throat nervously. "Look, Mr. Morris," he said, "I don't want to sound smart-alecky or anything, but a man in your position—what I mean is, anybody in the public eye for any reason—has got to expect some crank phone calls. The only way to stop it is to get yourself an unlisted number."

"These aren't just crank calls," I said with some impatience. "And I already have an unlisted number."

"Oh?" Riegeler said. He pulled out his notebook. "Then maybe you better fill me in on the details."

"There's not much to tell," I said. "The calls started shortly after my wife and I returned to town. They continued—perhaps two or three times a week—ever since."

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"Uh-huh," Riegeler said. He scribbled something in his notebook, then tapped his chin with the pencil. "What kind of calls are they? What I mean is, are they threatening? Abusive? Or what?"

I shook my head. "No," I said, "they're just—nothing. I picked up the phone, say hello, and all I hear is the connection being broken and then the empty line."

"And that's all? Could be just somebody getting a wrong number and hanging up to try again."

I smiled derisively. "It hardly seems likely. In the first place, there couldn't be that many wrong numbers. And in the second place, wouldn't a wrong number identify himself or at least ask for somebody? What I mean is," I said, unconsciously parroting Riegeler, "how could someone tell he'd gotten a wrong number just from hearing a hello?"

"Yeah," Riegeler said, "I guess you got a point there." He tapped his chin again with the pencil. "This is a pretty big house for just two people. You have any servants?"

"Yes," I said. "A maid and a cook."

"Do they ever answer the phone?"

"The maid does. During the day, that is. She leaves for the night at six o'clock, and the cook a little later. After that it would be either my wife or myself."

Riegeler nodded. "I see," he said. "Have you checked with the maid or your wife to see if they've gotten any calls like this?"

"I have," I said, "and, no, they haven't."

Riegeler's huge hand came up to stroke his chin. "That's kind of odd, isn't it?" he said. "You being the only one to get them?"

I flushed. "Do you think I'm making this up?"

"No," Riegeler said hastily, dropping his hand. "I don't think that at all." He paused for a moment as if weighing his words carefully, then went on, "Just the same, I don't know that there's anything we can do to help you. There are all sorts of ways to trap or at least discourage a crank caller. But—" he shrugged helplessly—"they're all based on the assumption that he's going to be on the phone for at least a minute or two. Somebody who just hangs up as soon as you answer the phone has pretty much got us beat. So—" He spread his hands.

I had been listening to him patiently, a slight smile curving my lips. Now I said, "I realize all that. But, you see, I know who's making these calls."

Riegeler looked up sharply. "Oh?" he said. "Who?"

"My first wife's father," I said triumphantly. "Martin Neil."

Riegeler studied me impassively. "And how do you know that?" he said.

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"Because," I went on, "he knows my unlisted number. He used to call it often enough before—" I paused and wet my lips, then went on—"before my wife was killed. He's a vindictive old cuss and I'm convinced he still thinks I killed her. Grief I can understand and make allowances for. But this is pure malice. And I want it stopped. I want you to face Martin Neil with the knowledge of his vicious little trick."

Riegeler shook his head slowly. "I don't think that would be such a good idea, Mr. Morris," he said. "All he'd do is deny he made the calls and that would be it."

"That's where you're wrong," I said. I began to rummage in the top desk drawer. "Over the past several weeks I've been keeping a log of the dates and times of the calls. It should be—ah, here it is." I drew out a folded sheet of yellow legal-size paper. "Ask Martin Neil to account for his whereabouts at those times." I smiled tightly. "See what he says then."

Riegeler looked at the list dubiously. "All right," he said at last, "if you'll swear out a complaint I'll talk to Neil." He stood up. "But don't expect too much to come of it."

"Don't you expect too little, Sergeant," I said, using Riegeler's rank for the first time.

I sat at my desk for a long time after Riegeler had gone, staring at the chair where he had sat. And the full horror of those weeks and months following my wife's murder swept over me again.

It was one of those things you read about in the papers and think can never happen to you. My wife's smashed car with her battered and dead body inside had been found at the bottom of a ravine just outside of town. By some fluke the car hadn't caught fire, so the police were able to ascertain that she hadn't died in the wreck. She had been murdered.

The police were very polite—at first. They understood my feelings, they said. But there were things they had to know if they were going to catch Louise's killer. So if I wouldn't mind answering a few questions—

"Of course, I don't mind," I had said. "Anything I can do to clear up this tragic—" My voice had faltered and I recovered with an effort. "I'm sorry, Sergeant—uh?"

"Riegeler," the man with the huge hands had supplied. "We'd just like to clear up a few points. Like, weren't you worried when your wife didn't come home last night?" In other words, why hadn't I called the police when she hadn't returned?

I took a deep breath. "Quite frankly, Sergeant," I said, "my

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wife and I quarreled last night and she slammed out of the house in a rage. I expected she'd be spending the night with her father. It wasn't unusual."

There had been no point in holding anything back. The servants had overheard the quarrel and Martin Neil was sure to come forward with details of Louise's and my stormy life together.

"I see," Riegeler said. "What was the quarrel about? Another woman?"

So he had been talking to Martin.

"Yes," I said. Again, it would have been senseless for me to deny it. "Louise and I haven't—hadn't been in love with each other for years. I found someone else and I wanted my freedom."

"I see," Riegeler said again. He stared at me thoughtfully for a long moment before continuing. "Look, Mr. Morris, you do have certain rights, you know, And before we go on, maybe I'd better make sure you know what they are."

I think it was his flat mechanical voice as he droned out my Constitutional rights that panicked me. In any case, when he had finished and gone on to ask his next question—where had I been last night—I made a near-fatal mistake. I said that after Louise had stormed out I had driven over to see Irene.

At any other time it would have been all right. Irene would have lied willingly for me. But that night of all nights her brother had taken her to a theater party and there were at least a dozen people to swear that I was nowhere around.

Given that lead, Riegeler had gone to work with a determination to prove me guilty of murder—a determination so single-minded that it was frightening. He built enough of a case to blacken my name and cause my arrest. But it wasn't quite good enough. The grand jury refused to indict.

Irene and I were married four days later—over her family's strenuous objections—and we left for Europe immediately. I had begun to wish that we had stayed there.

Riegeler phoned me later that evening. "I'm afraid I've got some bad news, Mr. Morris," he said. "You were wrong about Neil. He has an alibi for just about every time you got one of those crank calls."

"What?" I could hardly believe it.

"It's the truth," Riegeler said. "At nine o'clock on the fifteenth—when you got the last call—he was in a restaurant with friends. Didn't leave the table the whole time, he says, and plenty of witnesses to prove it. The time before that—on the tenth—he

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was home alone. But on the sixth at eight thirty he was at a concert with some people named Grant." Riegeler paused. "You want me to go on?"

"No," I managed to say, "that's quite enough." My mind was in a daze; I couldn't think clearly. I heard words but they had no meaning for me.

"You still there, Mr. Morris?" Riegeler said when I failed to reply to something he had said.

"Yes," I said. I shook my head to clear it. "I'm sorry, Sergeant. I didn't quite follow what you were saying."

"I said, that puts us right back where we started. Unless you got some other ideas."

"No," I said slowly, "if it's not Martin I have no idea who it could be."

There were others, of course, who bore me no good. Irene's brother Paul, for example. Right before our wedding he'd told Irene she was throwing her life away and had cursed me to my face. But that was more like Paul's style—not anonymous phone calls.

"Well, in that case," Riegeler said, "about the only advice I can give you is to get your phone number changed." He hesitated and I could almost hear the wheels whirring inside his brain. "I don't know quite how to put this," he went on slowly, "but there is one other possibility that you ought to give some thought to. Maybe those calls aren't meant for you at all. Maybe they're meant for your wife and it's just a case of if a man answers hang up. You know what I mean?"

I put the phone down before he could say more. "Yes, Sergeant," I said into the empty room, "I know what you mean."

That evening at dinner I found myself staring speculatively at Irene. After all we had been through together, her finding another man was the last thing I would have suspected. But was it so inconceivable after all? Our own affair had started while I was still married to Louise. And if Irene had thought so little of the marriage vow then, would she respect it the more now?

She brought me back to the present by rapping sharply on the table. "You haven't heard a word I've said all evening," she said. "Is something bothering you?"

"No," I said, guiltily turning my attention back to my plate.

"Something must be," she persisted. "You've been staring at me in the oddest way for the longest time. And if there's something wrong, I think you should tell me about it."

From her tone she was set to pursue the matter to the bitter end, but the phone rang in the next room.

"I'll get it," I said quickly, and

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dropped my napkin beside my plate and left the table.

I picked up the phone and held it silently against my ear. When there was no reaction from the caller I said cautiously, "Hello?"

The line went dead in my ear. Automatically I checked my watch for the time to enter in my log. Then I thought angrily: what's the use? And slammed the phone down in its cradle.

"Who was it?" Irene asked as I resumed my seat.

"Wrong number," I said shortly and pretended to concentrate on my food.

Not five minutes later the phone rang again.

"My turn," Irene said and was halfway out of the room before I could even start to protest.

I watched her go with an odd mixture of dread and anticipation. Was there any significance in her closing the door behind her? It was all I could do to keep from dashing over, opening the door, and confronting her.

She wasn't gone long—but long enough to tell me that this had been no "wrong number."

"Who was it?" I said when she returned. I hoped my voice didn't sound as forced to her as it did to me.

"Another magazine salesman," Irene said, sitting down and picking up her napkin. "Honestly, I get so tired of these people who call at all hours of the day and night to try to sell you things you have no earthly use for."

True or false?

Riegeler's words burned in my brain. I had to know the answer.

After dinner I made some excuse for going out for the rest of the evening. Some business, I said, that I'd forgotten to mention earlier and that couldn't be delayed until morning. "Don't wait up," I told Irene as I left, "I'll be quite late."

I circled the block in my car, then parked back on my own street facing my house—far enough away so that I wouldn't be noticed but close enough so that I had a clear view.

It seemed a tranquil domestic scene: the long semicircular drive gleaming whitely across the shadowed lawn, the house itself dark upstairs and brightly lit below. I began to feel foolish, sitting there spying on my own wife.

But I didn't budge from the spot.

Nothing happened that first night. Or the second. Or the third.

But on the fourth—

I hadn't been out of the house half an hour when the glare of lights in my side mirror told me that a car was approaching from the rear. I hunched in the corner between the street and the door until it was past—out of an instinctive fear of being caught

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in an embarrassing position more than anything else. The car continued down the street a short distance, then slowed and turned off—into my driveway.

I was too far away and it was too dark for me to make out features. But there was no mistaking that it was a man, and that he was alone. I caught the outline of hat and shoulders as he stood briefly in the light cast through the open door. There was no mistaking either that he was obviously welcome.

I sat in the car, gripping the wheel so hard that my knuckles ached. I'd give them half an hour, I told myself. Then there could be no cover-up, no possibility of doubt to cloud the issue.

But, of course, impatience won out and I burst in on them minutes later.

Irene started up fearfully from the sofa where she was sitting, but the man beside her put a restraining hand on her shoulder.

"It's better this way, Irene," he said. "I've hated all this sneaking around." He stood up and came toward me, one hand out. "How about it, John? Shall we be friends?"

It wasn't the reaction I'd expected. But then he wasn't the man I'd expected either. He was Irene's brother, Paul.

I stared blankly from one to the other of them. "But—" I stammered. "I don't understand—I thought—"

I saw understanding sweep across Paul's face and the beginnings of anger in Irene's.

"You thought Irene had a lover," Paul said. He shook his head and smiled wryly. "Well, I guess we asked for that." He paused, took a deep breath, then went on, "I had time to do a lot of thinking while you two were in Europe. I'll be honest about it. You weren't my choice for Irene's husband. But you were her choice and that's what counts. And in any case, Irene's all the family I've got left. So when you got back I got in touch with her. We weren't sure how you'd react, though. Some harsh things were said before the wedding. So—" Paul spread his hands—"she didn't tell you. It was foolish, but—"

I leaned back against the door, almost laughing in my relief. "So," I said, "you're the one who made all those phone calls and hung up as soon as I answered."

Paul frowned. "No," he said, "why should I?"

"What phone calls?" Irene said.

Without holding anything back, I told them about the phone calls that had been making my life a hell. "Somebody," I concluded, "who saw the two of you together and didn't know your relationship has been going to a lot of trouble to make me think Irene's been unfaithful."

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Irene shuddered. "It's disgusting," she said. "Who could be that vicious?"

"Who?" I said. "Martin Neil. Who else?"

"Now just a minute," Paul said. "I thought the detective found out that Neil had alibis for most of the time the calls were made."

"Of course he had alibis," I said. "Because he knew he was going to need them. Riegeler's mistake was that he didn't go beyond Neil's word. I'll bet my life that if you check into it you'll find those alibis are lies." I had been sitting. Now I stood up and started pulling on my coat. "And that's just what I'm going to have out with him right now."

"I'll go with you," Paul said.

"No," I said, buttoning the coat. "This is something that has to be settled between Neil and myself."

There was surprise on Neil's face as he opened the door to my knock. Surprise and something else too. Fear perhaps? Guilt? I'd worked up too great an anger on the trip over to analyze it. I brushed by him into the room.

Neil stood by the still-open door. "You're not welcome here, John," he said coldly.

"This isn't a social call," I said. "Now close that door unless you want to bring the whole apartment house in on your business."

Neil hesitated, then pushed the door away from him. It swung shut, didn't quite latch, and slipped back open a fraction of an inch.

"All right," Neil said, coming forward to face me. "Now suppose you tell me why you've come bursting in here at this hour of the night?"

"Don't act so innocent," I said. "I'm on to your little game and I want it stopped. I want you to leave me alone."

"You want *me* to leave *you* alone?"

"Yes," I said angrily. "I returned to this town to take back the place in society that's mine by right. But you won't leave me in peace. You keep harassing me."

Neil shook his head slowly. "You really are a wonder, John. You send a policeman over to investigate me. You burst into my apartment without my approval. And then you have the gall to accuse *me* of harassing *you*."

"You're just like your daughter," I yelled. "You're twisting my words and using them against me. Well, she didn't get away with it and you won't either!"

Neil took a step back from me. "My God!" he said. "You *did* kill her. When they let you go I began to doubt your guilt. But you did kill her."

"All right," I said, alarmed at the enormity of my admission but no longer able to stop. "I killed

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her. She stood in my way. Just as you're standing in my way now."

"What are you going to do, John?" Neil said. "Kill me too? Perhaps you'd better. Because I'm going to see to it that you pay for Louise's death. The law may not be able to punish you, but—" Neil paused and then said grimly, "So you want to take your rightful place in society, do you, John? Well, I can guarantee you that. Because when I'm done with you, decent people will spit at the sound of your name."

My groping hand found what it sought—a heavy metal statuette—closed on it and was raising it for the vicious downward swing that would silence him forever.

I never swung it. A sharp voice from the doorway caught me.

"I wouldn't, Mr. Morris."

The vase clattered on the floor, and I swung around. "Riegeler," I gasped. "How—"

"How did I get here?" He was leaning negligently against the doorjamb now, but there was nothing negligent about the gun in his hand. "Simple. I followed you. Just like I've been following you ever since you got back."

He straightened up and beckoned with the gun. "You had more than a year to think about how smart you were to get away with murder and to get cocky and overconfident. But I knew you. I knew that given the right sort of pressure you'd panic just like you did before and give yourself away. And this time, Mr. Morris, there won't be any slip-ups."

And looking into his implacable face I knew who'd been making those phone calls.

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a *NEW* Mr. Strang story by

WILLIAM BRITTAIN

In which Mr. Strang, the wizened old science teacher at Aldershot High School, finds himself personally involved in a student protest—yes, the demonstrations have reached the high-school level —with all the possible dire consequences of rioting, vandalism, violence, and bloodshed . . . and how gnomelike Mr. Strang, a kind of contemporary Thinking Machine, evolved an odd theory to explain an odd happening . . .

MR. STRANG TAKES A HAND

by WILLIAM BRITTAIN

NO, NO, I HAVEN'T FORGOTten, Miss Ansell. But you have to understand that under the circumstances—" Marvin W. Guthrey, Principal of Aldershot High School, ground his teeth and looked daggers at the telephone receiver in his hand as a voice from the other end of the line chattered in his ear. "I don't know what you expect me to do," he finally blurted out. "Goodbye, Miss Ansell!"

Guthrey slammed the receiver into its cradle and ran a hand nervously through his dense growth of snow-white hair which, in its present disheveled condition, gave the appearance of a cotton mop set down carelessly on his head. His eyes almost flashing sparks, he glanced up at Mr. Strang, standing at the other side of the desk.

"At a time like this I'm supposed to have the custodians inspect the lockers for overdue books," Guthrey groaned. "Oh, sit down, Mr. Strang! Use the sense you were born with. There's no reason for you to stand there like an idiot."

There was no reason, of course, for Guthrey to be angry with Mr. Strang. The spare wizened science teacher had been asked to report to the principal's office, and here he was. It was just that the whole

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thing was so unfair. With Aldershot High School facing a tense situation which might at any time erupt into violence, what right did the school librarian have to trouble Guthrey with anything as trivial as her damn—as some overdue library books?

"Sit down, Mr. Strang," Guthrey repeated more gently.

Mr. Strang eased himself into the chair at the corner of the desk and peered over the tops of his black-rimmed glasses at the harried principal.

"You did promise Miss Ansell you'd have the custodians check the students' lockers after school today," Mr. Strang said softly. "And you announced it on the public-address system during homeroom this morning."

"Yes, but that was before—" Guthrey paused.

"Before what?"

"Leonard, I've been hearing rumors all day about a student meeting that's to be held on the front lawn after school."

"Meeting?" The teacher dragged out his battered briar pipe, filled it, and applied a match. Clouds of foul-smelling smoke filled the room as he puffed away. "What kind of student meeting?" he asked.

"Last Friday, Sid Lewis was declared ineligible for the basketball team because of his low marks. Some of his friends—plus a few others—want to stage a protest. Apparently today's the day."

"Oh, yes." Mr. Strang leaned back in his chair and considered the office ceiling. "So the student protest movement has finally reached Aldershot. Signs, chanting, marching."

"If it was just limited to signs and chanting and marching I wouldn't be worried," said Guthrey. "But I understand this group—the ones who've organized the protest—are going to try and re-enter the building and perhaps break into some of the classrooms. They feel that a display of force will give their cause publicity."

"I wouldn't be surprised if they're right," replied the teacher. "It could happen, I suppose. This certainly wouldn't be the first place it's occurred."

Guthrey shook his head in dismay. "High-school students. Just kids. What's happening to the younger generation nowadays, anyway?"

"The younger generation?" Mr. Strang looked quizzically at his principal. "How many students do you expect to actively support this protest?"

"We're preparing for up to a hundred who might actually try to break in."

"One hundred students. Less than five percent of our student body."

"What do you mean by that?"

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"Let's take a good look at this five percent. You and I know who they'll be. They're the same ones who are always willing to take up any idiotic cause just to get their names in the paper. The ones who can't come to terms with themselves, to say nothing of coming to terms with the rest of humanity. The ones who give the whole school a bad name because they get their kicks out of using marijuana and even some of the more potent narcotics. The five percent who are so jealous about protecting their own so-called 'rights' that they walk all over the rights of everybody else."

"Look, Leonard, a sermon's the last thing I need right now—"

"But, Mr. Guthrey, this type of student isn't representative of the younger generation. Oh, teenagers are making themselves heard, and many of their protests are justified. But in this case? Aren't school athletics still a privilege, not something a student is automatically entitled to?"

"You're right, of course. Still—" Guthrey slumped forward in his chair. "Rioting. Narcotics. Right here in our school. What's the world coming to, Leonard?"

"It would help if the parents of our fair village would wake up to the fact that these things aren't just problems you read about in the papers. They're here in Aldershot and in a lot of other smug little suburban communities throughout the country."

"Unfortunately," Guthrey grumbled, "that five percent you spoke of are the ones who'll make the newspaper headlines tomorrow if there's any property damage or if anybody gets hurt here today. That's why I wanted to see you, Leonard."

"You want *me* to stop them?" asked the teacher in genuine surprise.

"Not exactly." Guthrey allowed himself a sickly smile. "But the kids respect you, Leonard. I'd feel easier if I knew you were in the building here keeping an eye on the doors. Just in case they do try to break in."

"Do I get some help? Or will I be all alone guarding the way, like Horatius at the bridge?"

"Oh, all the doors will be locked, of course. And in addition, Inspector Adams has assigned two police officers—Drescher and Sturdevant—to keep an eye on the outside of the building. But they can't watch all the doors simultaneously. However, each will have a key in case he needs to get inside in a hurry."

"Sounds as if you've touched all the bases," said Mr. Strang. "Our own little maximum-security schoolhouse. Well, why not?" Stiffly the slender teacher rose to leave.

"I'll be doing some patrolling myself," said Guthrey. "And Leonard—be careful."

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"When it comes to protecting life and limb—especially my own—I'm the soul of discretion," replied Mr. Strang. "One shout of warning is the most you can expect from me. After that I'll be off and running, looking for a place to hide. I'm no hero, Mr. Guthrey. Just a teacher."

At 3:30 that afternoon Mr. Strang trudged through the deserted halls of Aldershot High School. Idly kicking a piece of paper lying on the floor he rounded a corner and headed toward the gym and shop areas to check the door near Mr. Haxton's room.

As he passed the open door to the boys' locker room he heard a sound. It might have been just water gurgling down a drain somewhere, but still—He listened carefully, but the sound didn't repeat itself.

He walked into the locker room, wrinkling his nose at the combined smell of leather, sneakers and sweat. The room was deserted. With a shrug he walked back into the hall.

There was the sound again. He glanced down the hallway. The door to Mr. Haxton's woodworking shop was open. Funny. But maybe Mr. Haxton had been particularly anxious to get out of the building early today. The teacher stepped inside and glanced around.

As usual the huge room was almost spotless. The tools were in their proper places in racks on the walls, while the benches and machines had been brushed and wiped until they nearly gleamed. All sawdust, wood chips, and other rubbish had been carefully deposited in two metal drums standing against one of the walls. Mr. Strang turned to leave.

And for the first time he saw what was behind the door through which he had just entered. As he looked he could feel cold sweat popping out on his face.

On the floor lay a man in a police uniform. One side of the officer's face was bloody, and a noise was coming from deep in his throat, as if he were trying to say something but couldn't. Mr. Strang knelt over the man, wondering how badly he was hurt. The officer's eyes were closed, but his lips were moving slightly. The teacher bent closer.

"Sawhorse!" came the mumbled sob. "Sawhorse—sawhorse sawhor—" And then silence.

It took perhaps ninety seconds for Mr. Strang to make his message about an injured policeman coherent enough over the intercom phone so that the main-office secretary could understand it. Perhaps another minute and a half was spent in locating Mr. Guthrey, who immediately called the Police Department. Two minutes after that the siren of an ambulance stationed nearby

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was heard approaching the school, followed by a stream of police cars. Within six minutes of the discovery of the unconscious officer he had been placed in the ambulance with an intern attending him, the school was surrounded by patrol cars, and the students who had gathered on the front lawn for their protest demonstration were shouting their annoyance because, as one of them put it, "Every time I go to scratch my head there's fuzz breathing down my neck."

Six minutes. But to Mr. Strang it seemed like a century.

"Sit down, Mr. Strang." Detective Paul Roberts took the chair from behind Mr. Haxton's desk and settled the trembling teacher into it. In his previous dealings with Mr. Strang, Roberts had always found the old man to be hale, chipper, and completely in command of any situation. Now, however, the pallor of his wrinkled features behind the ever-present glasses had the detective worried.

"Feel up to telling me what happened?" Roberts asked softly.

"There's not much to tell, Paul," replied Mr. Strang. "I found him lying over there behind the door. He had blood on his face and—Paul, he's going to be all right, isn't he?"

"I think so," replied Roberts. "The intern said lacerations and possible concussion. And remember, Sturdevant's a tough old cop."

"How did it happen, Paul? I mean—"

"Somebody hit him," Roberts answered, "with this."

He held up a large wooden mallet. Glancing at the tool rack Mr. Strang saw several similar tools.

"Now let's get your story," the detective said briskly.

Mr. Strang outlined the manner in which he had found the injured policeman.

"Sawhorse, huh?" mused Roberts when the teacher had finished. "Well, there are three of 'em over by the lathe." He walked over and gave each one a quick examination. "Just sawhorses," he said finally. "By the way, Mr. Strang, did you touch Sturdevant at all when you found him?"

"I don't know. I might have. Just to see how badly hurt—"

"No, I don't mean that. Did you loosen his clothing? To make him more comfortable, maybe?"

"No, I'm sure I didn't. Why?"

"Because his gunbelt had been taken off. We found it under that second workbench."

"I didn't do that. But what—"

"Everything that's usually on the belt is missing. Notebook, handcuffs—everything."

"Why would anybody want those things?"

"I don't know. And there's

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something else. His holster's empty."

"Then—"

"Yeah. We can't locate Sturdevant's .38 pistol."

Mr. Strang turned slowly to look out through the open doorway of the shop. A policeman had been injured. Students were being kept under guard. And now a pistol was missing.

This wasn't education. It was war.

"Paul?" he said softly.

"Yeah, Mr. Strang?"

"I want to do something. I want to help."

Roberts looked strangely at the teacher. Normally he didn't like outsiders meddling in problems of law enforcement. Still, this was Mr. Strang. On other occasions the gnomelike old science teacher had proved invaluable on cases assigned to the detective. Besides, the investigation hadn't got anywhere up to now.

"Okay, Mr. Strang," Roberts said. "You're in."

A plainclothes detective younger than Roberts appeared in the doorway to the shop. "Mr. Roberts?" he called.

Roberts looked up. "Yeah, Buckler?"

Buckler held out his hand. Dangling from his index finger was a ring almost filled with keys. "We found these in the keyhole of the door—the one that leads outside. They must have been Sturdevant's. His name's on the tag."

Roberts took the key ring and fingered the black disc on which JOSEPH STURDEVANT—ALDERSHOT P.D. was printed in white letters. As Roberts was about to put the keys in his jacket pocket Mr. Strang spoke.

"Mr. Buckler," he asked, "did you find those keys on the *outside* of the door?"

"Sure, where else? I mean there's no keyhole on the inside—just the release bar."

"Is that what you wanted to know, Mr. Strang?" Roberts asked.

"Yes. And now, if you don't mind, I'd like to go outside for a minute."

"Aren't you feeling well?" asked Roberts.

"As well as can be expected under the circumstances. But I just want to look through the window in that door."

"Mind telling me why?"

"Look, Paul. According to Mr. Guthrey, Officer Sturdevant was assigned to patrol the outside of the building. But when he passed the door he must have looked through the window and seen something *inside* that he thought needed investigation. So he used the key which Mr. Guthrey had given him to unlock the door and come in."

"Makes sense. Only why couldn't Sturdevant have seen

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something through one of the classroom windows? Instead of through the door, I mean."

"The classroom windows are too high off the ground. It keeps people outside from peering in when lessons are going on."

"Buckler, keep an eye on things in the shop here," Roberts ordered. "Come on, Mr. Strang."

The detective and the teacher walked out of the shop and through the exit door. They could hear the students in front of the building shouting protests at being kept under surveillance.

Shading his eyes, Mr. Strang peered through the window in the door. "Hmm," he muttered. "About twenty feet of hallway and three lockers."

"I beg your pardon," said Roberts.

"Three lockers. The ones directly across from Mr. Haxton's shop. That's all I can see from here."

Roberts took out Sturdevant's key ring and was trying to locate the key to the door when Buckler came racing up from inside the building, punched the release bar, and swung the heavy door open. He stood there waving a pistol in one hand.

"I found it, Mr. Roberts," he said almost joyfully.

"Put that thing down before you hurt somebody," Roberts said curtly. "You found what?"

"Sturdevant's pistol. This is it. I found it in one of those barrels of wood scraps. Way down at the bottom."

"Look, Buckler." Roberts toyed with the idea of chewing out the younger detective for destroying possible fingerprints on the weapon. Ah, what was the use? It was Roberts' case. He'd be held responsible for Buckler's mistakes. "Good going," he said gruffly, taking the pistol and examining it.

"Has it been fired?" asked Mr. Strang fearfully.

"Nope. Whoever hid it in that barrel apparently just wanted to get rid of it."

"But why?"

"Who knows? This thing gets crazier by the minute. Did you find any of Sturdevant's other things, Buckler?"

"Not yet," was the reply. "But I'm still looking."

"Well, if you get any bright ideas let me hear 'em real quick. I can't keep those kids out in front much longer. Their parents will be on my back as it is." He turned to face Mr. Strang.

"How about it?" Roberts asked the teacher. "Are you as confused about this as I am?"

"I'm afraid so. It would help, of course, if we knew what Officer Sturdevant saw that brought him inside the building."

"Maybe one of the kids coming out at dismissal—" Roberts began.

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"No, Paul. The students are dismissed from the rear of the building, not here. The only ones who'd be in this hallway are those who have lockers here."

"We could check out the kids who use those lockers. But what would we be looking for? Besides, I'd rather know why anybody would take off Sturdevant's gun-belt just to get rid of the pistol. But I'll tell you one thing. A cop's been hurt. I'll find out who did it if I have to take this school and everybody in it apart piece by piece."

"Take it easy, Paul," said the teacher.

"Ah, it burns me up!" snarled Roberts. "Sturdevant only had eighteen months to go before retirement. This assignment was supposed to be just a piece of cake for him. Patrol around the school for a few hours. So he ends up getting slugged. And for my money it was one of those kids out front who did it. Smart-aleck punks who think the law doesn't apply to them! I'll bet if we could search them we'd find they're all carrying grass."

"Paul, you're letting your emotions run away with you. Don't lower yourself to the level of—" The teacher's voice trailed off. He looked long and hard at the entrance to the shop and then at the lockers set into the opposite wall. "What did you just say?" he asked almost in a whisper.

"I said I'm getting tired of these kids who—"

"No, not that. You said 'grass.' That's slang for marijuana, isn't it?"

"Yeah. Grass, pot, Mary Jane. Even pushers don't like to call narcotics by their right names. What's on your mind?"

"I think I know what made Sturdevant come into the building."

Roberts' first thought was that the shock of the day's events had finally caught up with Mr. Strang. Then he asked, "Why don't you tell me about it?"

So Mr. Strang told him.

And when the teacher finished, Roberts found himself trying—and failing—to find a flaw in the odd theory he had just heard.

"That might be it, Mr. Strang," he said grudgingly. "But there's still no proof."

"I think I can provide that, too, if you'll let me."

"We could both get into a lot of trouble."

"A policeman's in the hospital, Paul."

"Buckler!" Roberts shouted. "Stay here and keep an eye on things. I'm going up to the main office with Mr. Strang."

After locating Guthrey, who allowed them to search through a file in the main office and then use the telephone, Roberts and Mr. Strang headed toward the

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front door of the building. As they walked outside into the cool air of late afternoon, almost a hundred voices were raised in raucous cries.

"Hey, Mr. Strang! You still teaching or have you joined the police?"

"Man, ain't you cops ever gonna let us go home?"

"We know our rights, fuzz. Book us or let us go!"

Ignoring the shouts, Roberts led Mr. Strang to one of the policemen surrounding the school yard. "This is Andy Drescher," he said. "He was on duty with Sturdevant. Mr. Strang, Andy."

"I recognize Andy," said the teacher. "He was in my chemistry class. About twelve years ago, wasn't it?"

"That's right," replied Drescher. Then he turned to the detective. "Any news about Sturdevant?" he asked grimly.

"Not yet," Roberts answered. "How are things out here?"

"Pretty bad," was the reply. "The parents don't like us keeping their kids here."

"Too bad." Roberts reached into his pocket, pulled out a slip of paper, and handed it to Drescher. "See if any of these three kids are in this mob. If so, I want to see them inside—in the principal's office. Tell the rest they can go home."

Ten minutes later one of the policemen hauled a portable loudspeaker from the back seat of his car. "Boys and girls!" he began, his amplified voice echoing in the still air. "It's all over. You can leave now!" Slowly at first, then faster, the crowd of students began to break up and move away from Aldershot High School.

Later, in Marvin W. Guthrey's office, Roberts and Mr. Strang sat in straight-backed chairs against one wall, looking at the seventeen-year-old boy opposite them. Avoiding their gaze, the boy slouched against the wall, fixedly examining the fingernails of his right hand, while his left was crammed deep into a pocket of his tan sports jacket. Guthrey sat behind his desk, nervously considering the well-dressed man who stood in front of him shaking an admonishing finger in the principal's face.

"I want—no, I *demand*—to know the reason why you're keeping my boy detained here!" the man shouted with a dramatic sweep of his hand.

Guthrey glanced at Roberts.

"Mr. Beldeck," Roberts began, "a policeman was assaulted in this building a short time ago. I'm the detective in charge of the case. Now this isn't a formal hearing or anything like that. We just thought you might like to hear what we have to say. Of course, if you'd like to call your lawyer—"

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"My lawyer will be brought into this," said Mr. Beldeck, "the moment you make a single charge against my son that can't be proved in court. In the meantime, I think I'm capable of safeguarding his rights. And the first thing I'm advising him to do is keep his mouth shut. Do you understand that, George?"

The boy nodded, scowling at Roberts, and continued his perusal of his fingernails.

Roberts' heart sank. He could see his chances for further promotion fast disappearing. Perhaps he should never have placed so much trust in Mr. Strang. Almost desperately he turned toward the teacher. If there was any real proof, now was the time to bring it out.

Mr. Strang rose to his feet. "I'm a teacher here, Mr. Beldeck," he said almost shyly. "My name's Strang." Beldeck ignored the extended hand.

"I suppose I'm the reason that George is here at all," the teacher went on. "But this isn't a trial. Nobody as yet has been accused of anything. I just thought that perhaps you might like to hear some of my thoughts on the case. Fair enough?"

"I'll reserve judgment until I've heard what you have to say," replied Beldeck.

"Your privilege, of course," said Mr. Strang. "May I begin?"

Beldeck shrugged.

Whipping off his glasses Mr. Strang perched on the edge of Guthrey's desk. It was the same pose he had assumed in front of classes at Aldershot for more than a quarter of a century.

"Officer Sturdevant—the injured man—had the duty of patrolling the outside of this building at approximately dismissal time today," he began. "At that time most of the students went home. About a hundred, however, remained here to attend a protest meeting. One of those who remained was your son."

"So he was at the meeting," said Beldeck. "He's not a regular at them. This is the first time he's ever showed any interest in this protest stuff. But was it a crime for him to attend?"

"Of course not," Mr. Strang answered. "But to get back to Sturdevant. I believe that as he passed the door near the shop, he saw something inside the building, something that made him unlock the door and enter. He was in a hurry, too. So much so that he left his key ring in the lock. Now at dismissal time, the only students who'd be in that particular hallway are those who have lockers there. And only three lockers can be seen from the window in the door—one of which belongs to George here. In fact, he's the only one of the three students assigned those three lockers who did not go straight

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home. Mr. Roberts confirmed this by phone just a few minutes ago."

"Is that all you have to offer, Mr. Strang?" asked Beldeck. "The fact that my son has a locker within sight of that door and that he went to a meeting today?"

"No, there's more," replied Mr. Strang. "But it's important to present the facts in their proper order. Now let's consider what Officer Sturdevant saw at one of those three lockers."

"Well, what did he s e e?'' Guthrey chimed in.

"He told us himself," said Mr. Strang.

"How?"

"The word 'sawhorse.' You see, the fact that he was struck down in the shop was misleading. I'm sure he wasn't indicating the wooden sawhorses there, b u t that's the way we first understood it."

"So what was he trying to say?" snapped Beldeck.

Mr. Strang looked f r o m Beldeck to his son and back again. "Saw horse," he s a i d slowly. "Two words."

"I still don't get it."

"Horse, Mr. Beldeck, is a slang term for the drug heroin. And that's what I believe Sturdevant saw—someone taking packets of heroin out of one of the three lockers. The packaging of illegal heroin, by the way, is usually quite distinctive. It's a white powder, and it's often put into clear plastic pouches. Pretty hard stuff to mistake for something else. So, if I'm correct, Sturdevant saw someone who was either a user or was p u s h i n g the drug—selling it to others. Perhaps both."

"Oh, come on!" Beldeck strode up to the teacher, s c o w l i n g angrily. "Of all the far-fetched—Assuming somebody—either my son or somebody else—had this 'horse' in his locker, why would he be taking it out today? Or was this afternoon's protest meeting for addicts only?"

"I think Mr. Guthrey can answer that," said the teacher.

"Me?" exclaimed the principal. "But I haven't any idea—"

"You were on the telephone when I came into the office this morning," said Mr. S t r a n g. "Whom were you talking to?"

"Oh, yes." Guthrey thought for a moment. "Why, it was Miss Ansell, our librarian. She wanted a locker inspection."

"A locker inspection this afternoon." Mr. Strang smiled. "So whoever had the 'horse' in his locker had to get it out of there before it was found during locker inspection."

Beldeck took a long look at the teacher. "Very ingenious," he said. "Very ingenious i n d e e d. Pure supposition, of course. And even if it were so, that's no indication that George—"

"Mr. Beldeck" said Mr. Strang

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reprovingly. "I call on everyone present to bear witness that not once have I mentioned your boy in connection with what happened to Sturdevant."

"Then why did you bring him here? Why am *I* here?"

"I'll get to that. But when you interrupted I was just mentioning the reason I believe Sturdevant came into the building. To go on, it's my idea that he went into Mr. Haxton's shop to make the actual arrest. Perhaps he wanted to be sure there wouldn't be any interruptions from his captive's friends."

"Mr. Strang," said Beldeck, glancing at his watch. "It's getting rather late. Can we leave this high-flown theorizing and stick to the facts? You haven't got a shred of evidence against my son—or anyone else, for that matter."

"I didn't do anything," growled the boy sullenly.

"Of course not," said his father. "But these gentlemen seem to think you did. The proof, Mr. Strang, if you please."

"All right!" snapped the teacher. "Let's begin with the fact that the person who clubbed Sturdevant removed his gunbelt and concealed all the items on it. Most of them we haven't found yet. Probably he hid the drugs at the same time. The belt was a neat bit of misdirection. Unfortunately for him, we found the gun."

"So?"

"So it occurs to me that whoever removed the belt was trying to cover up the fact that there was something else—something besides the gun—that was missing."

"Like what?" asked Beldeck.

Mr. Strang ignored him and turned to Roberts. "Paul," he said, "pretend I'm Sturdevant's prisoner, standing in front of that tool rack. Would you illustrate what a policeman does in such a situation."

"Sure." Roberts got up and pointed at the teacher with his index finger. "Pretend this is a gun," he said. "Okay, now, Mr. Strang. Hands against the wall. Spread your legs."

Mr. Strang assumed the required position, his arms above his head and his back to Roberts.

"Put your left hand behind your head." Mr. Strang did so. "All right, now I snap a handcuff around your left wrist. Next I—ow! Hey, that hurt!"

Roberts rubbed the side of his head where Mr. Strang, whirling quickly, had connected with a fist. "We all get careless, Paul," said the teacher. "I think you're supposed to hook a foot around my ankle to trip me if necessary. I think Sturdevant also forgot."

Beldeck was watching the demonstration with deep interest. "You're pretty fast on your feet for an old man, Mr. Strang," he said.

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"You're way ahead of me now, Mr. Beldeck, aren't you?" replied the teacher.

"Well, I'm not," said Guthrey. "What is all this about, Mr. Strang?"

"I think what happened to Detective Roberts just now is the same thing that happened to Sturdevant," answered the teacher. "He got the first handcuff on but before he could lock the second, his captive turned and hit him. But unlike me, that unknown person had a wooden mallet in his hand."

"Wait a minute," Guthrey said. "That leaves this person—whoever it was—with a handcuff still on his left wrist."

"Exactly." Mr. Strang smiled. "The keys of which were still on the ring in the lock of the outer door, a fact the attacker couldn't possibly know. That was the reason for the removal of Sturdevant's belt—to conceal the fact that Sturdevant's handcuffs were missing."

The teacher walked to George Beldeck, who was still lounging against the wall. "George," said Mr. Strang, "at your father's request you haven't said much during this entire discussion. You're within your rights in not saying anything now. But I'd still be interested in the real reason you stayed around school today instead of going straight home."

He looked toward Mr. Beldeck, then back to the boy. "You were afraid your parents would see it, isn't that right, George? Because you couldn't get it off!"

Slowly the old teacher extended a hand. "You've kept your left hand—and wrist—concealed in the pocket of your sports jacket. George," he said softly. "Come on, prove me wrong. Show everybody I'm nothing but an old crackpot."

George Beldeck looked at the hand outstretched toward him. "You—you've got no right!" he suddenly shouted. "You can't make me. Dad, tell him!"

Mr. Beldeck saw his son's shoulders start to tremble. "Dad?" pleaded the youth.

"Do what he says, George," said Beldeck in a shaking voice.

Slowly the boy's arm came out of the pocket. Slowly it moved toward the teacher until the hand of the boy met the hand of the old man.

On George Beldeck's left wrist a handcuff was tightly clamped. The other cuff, catching the fading light coming through the window, dangled loosely from its short chain.

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a *NEW* crime *NOVELET* by

GERALD KERSH

Remember Gerald Kersh's two tales of Bo Raymond, as recounted by Swindle Sheet Morris, that appeared in the July 1965 issue of EQMM? (Pity if you missed them!) They were, as we said then, "mad, mad yarns told in embellished and embroidered prose." And in an Editors' Postscript we said that Gerald Kersh was thinking of doing more wild and woolly stories about the crime reporter known as Swindle Sheet Morris.

Well, Mr. Kersh did do another Swindle Sheet story—the last story that Gerald Kersh wrote before his untimely death. (Oh, the ranks are thinning, but the memory of those who have gone will not perish from the earth.) Gerald Kersh's stories resemble in some ways—only in some *ways, mind you—Ben Hecht's yarns; and now that both have left us, we realize how much their vivid, blue-streak, flamboyant, grandiose and grandiloquent storytelling, often bizarre and hilarious (an irresistible combination), will be missed. The Gerald Kersh and Ben Hecht stories are modern fairy tales—'tec pyrotechnics . . .*

MR. TOMORROW

by GERALD KERSH

SWINDLE SHEET MORRIS OFTEN said of political prophets that, given a free press, anybody of average intelligence who had learned how to read the newspapers could pass as prescient. Now, having kept an eye (a cloudy gray eye like one of Harpo Marx's spit bubbles full of cigarette smoke) on the ebb and flow of vogues and crazes in the publishing trade with a view to ready money, and seeing a wave of the macabre comedy called Black Humor coming in, Swindle Sheet Morris rushed out

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to meet it with a bundle of selected pieces hitherto unpublished. And it is a proof of the affection with which we all regarded him that when he came spluttering home on the crest of a wave with a best-seller titled *Trousseaux, Toros, and Tigers in Trousers,* there was scarcely a newspaperman among his colleagues in Fleet Street who wasn't almost as happy as if this stroke of good luck and shrewd judgment had been his own. In the course of forty years in the newspaper business, Swindle Sheet said, any sensitive man is bound, occasionally, to come upon a story which he must write in his own way or bust; and having written it, shelve it—stick it on the spike and starve. But things came round; here we were, and what would we have to drink?

His joy was a delight to see: proud as any reporter may be of his status as such, he still hankers after that little extra prestige which is his, he feels, when he can point to his name in gold on the spine of a hardcover book. But when a New York publisher made a substantial offer for his work and invited him to come over and help promote the sale of it, Swindle Sheet Morris was in his glory. He had superstitious admiration for the New York press, and hung over his bed was a framed front page of *Variety* with a headline that said *STIX NIX HICK PIX*—which meant that films with bucolic settings were unpopular in agricultural districts. "That ain't a headline—it's a poem!" Swindle Sheet would say, talking in the manner of that dying species of pariah journalist whose every word is a burglar's jimmy designed to be got in edgeways through cracks in other people's statements. He was born too late, he told me. "James Gordon Bennett was the man for me. 'Stanley, Dr. Livingstone is lost somewhere in Africa. Go and find him.' What a float Stanley must have established with the cashier . . . And those pipsqueaks across the street raise Cain over a two-shilling taxi fare on the Expense Sheet!"

Normally impatient of the niceties of the toilet, and holding the opinion that the collar button, like the bottom button of the waistcoat, was the one you didn't do up, he appeared comparatively natty when he came to have a going-away drink at the Grub Street Club. But although clothes had a way of conforming, or submitting, to Swindle Sheet Morris, his blue suit, scarcely three hours off a Piccadilly clothier's rack, already showed signs of resistance to his occupation. Between vest and waistband a new white shirt was already in communication with the outside world, and although he was standing upright his trousers were sitting down.

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"I'll have to appear on TV," e said, "I don't want to let old ngland down. I'll have to give ılks. I thought it best to look nd of formal. I wonder if they'd o *Trousseaux, Torsos* in Multi-ledia. You know Multi-Media? he book is in sections, with ings you touch, smell, taste, et etera—like that Halloween game ıds used to play, *The Witch Is lead,* where they pass cold paghetti and peeled grapes from and to hand in the dark as guts, yes, and whatnot. Hell, what a ensation that *Come Up and Saw Ie Sometime* piece would be in Aulti-Media!"

A young reporter had the emerity to say, "They ought to o *you* in Multi-Media, Swindler."

Morris said, "Yes. For com-lexion and texture, a slice of Aortadella sausage. Add an erosol bomb of stewed tea made vith tinned milk and mixed with tale pale ale and gasper smoke. Et cetera, et cetera. But for what's ere, and here"—he touched his reast and forehead—"you poor ttle snurge, they'd have to fall ack on old-fashioned fine writ-ng. But what would *you* know ıbout that?"

So he left good old England, arrying a portable typewriter and ı brief case containing one drip-dry shirt, two pairs of the kind of socks you wear for a week and then throw away, and a huge quantity of British cigarettes. Travel by jet being what it is, he was back in London in a fortnight—before we had time to miss him—so that an old headline writer who had slipped into a timeless doze in his corner just as Swindle Sheet had finished rebuking the brash young reporter, opened bleary eyes and, knocking his pipe against an ashtray in applause, cried, "Quite right, Morris, quite right—call the damned whippersnappers to order, confound 'em!"

"Just you try it and see," Morris said. "Do you want to know something? John Donne, with his 'never send to know for whom the bell tolls,' was all wet. And Hemingway was wetter still for quoting him. 'Any man's death diminishes me' in the middle of a population explosion, with four billion head of people predicted for the year two thousand, is a lot of eyewash. At the present rate of progress—if progress is the word for it—about two and one-half billion of them will be creative writers, so-called; and of these, according to my personal observation, about two-thirds will be only semiliterate. The other one-third will be infant prodigies—the kind that win washing machines on quiz programs at eight years of age, write a novel at eighteen, and then go mad. Give me a pale ale—a warm pale ale, please . . ."

Everything was all right, he told

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me, until the publicity woman at Beekman Sutton, Inc. sent him to have an informal talk with postgraduate students in something called a Creative Writing Workshop at Button Gwinnett University, since any author who found a following on the campuses was made for life. Look at Salinger, she said, look at William Golding, look at Tolkien. "Make it free and easy. Talk about something uncomplicated, like The Newspaperman as Living Historian, and make a question-and-answer thing of it. Incidentally, there's a fee of one hundred dollars, plus travel expenses—"

Swindle Sheet Morris told her to say no more, but to lead him to it . . .

I thought at first (he said) that I'd come to the wrong shop and wandered into a theatrical class, or something potty of that sort. I've always thought of college students as fresh-faced kids, give or take a pimple or two, in flannel trousers. These were getting on in years, and some of the men wore whiskers and strings of beads. One of 'em had on a silver locket about the size of a meat pie. Another one had a rose in a glass of water and kept sniffing at it. The best form of defense being attack, I plunged right in.

"Writing is easy. All you have to do is sit down and look at your typewriter keyboard un your forehead breaks out in sm drops of blood—"

But a girl with a neck a shoulders like a hock bottle pip up in a piercing little voice wi "Red Smith said that!"

I said, "If you want to be writer, the only thing to do is write."

She said, "That's out c Epictetus' *Discourses!*"

"But if you don't write to l read, you might just as well n write at all," I said.

"That's one of Martial' Epigrams!" she said.

Ignoring her I went on, "B a writer, the same as a couturie must mind the fashion." And u she came with, "Thomas Fulle *Gnomologia!*" It was like one tim when I was trapped by a mo in a back alley in Valletta: on sign of weakness and I was los In such cases you went for th leader.

So I said to the bottle-necke girl, "Righto, darling, so yo swallowed a dictionary of quot tions. Everything's been sai before and will be said again. Ca me the millionth monkey. I kne a man just like you who mad his living because he'd memorize every date in history. And the a cog slipped and he foun himself hooking the wrong date to the right events, poor ol duck . . . and there's human in terest—Living History—in *that,*

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ou know how to look at it. But you don't shut up and let your ders and betters talk, so help e I'll make you wish your infat-ated parents had slapped your ottom, red, white, and blue the rst time you showed off by recit-g the whole of Deuteronomy at e age of four. Okay?"

And I sensed an easing of nsion. I could have done a lot or those kids, I thought, if they ad looked like the right aterial—wouldn't have minded nparting to them the Five Golden ules pertaining to the making p of Expense Accounts, or windle Sheets, which I had for-ulated and for which I was icknamed, without which nobody as quite entitled to call himself Creative Writer.

And then again, people who aid good money to learn the Art f Writing, at an age when I was upporting two families by my en—well, the true inwardness of he game was bound to be wasted on 'em. They couldn't have our ind of ticker, or moxy. It was a dying art. Reading was becom-ng redundant. So I gave 'em a bit of Living History. And damn t all, who was more entitled to do so than a man like me, from he Midlands of old England, birth place of Shakespeare, D. H. Lawrence, John Bunyan, William Cowper, Arnold Bennett, and so orth? Ink was in my blood—ink s my blood.

I worked four years on the *County Advertiser* for no wages, I told them, living frugally on nothing a week. Then, with my scanty savings in my pocket, I went up to London to make my name on Fleet Street, where the offices of all the great newspapers are, my flair being for crime reporting. "And if you think this is an easy thing to do," I assured the class, "then you have another think coming. The top-ranking by-lined specialist in the homburg hat who is on speaking terms with Commissioners and is competent to talk shop with New Scotland Yard Superintendents, belongs to a race apart, like the old-time Foreign Correspondent. Yet that's what I had set my heart on be-coming, being young and sanguine.

"My great hope lay in a man named Big Pat Fox, who was trying to make a go of a rickety weekly called *Merrie England,* which specialized in what were advertised as 'sensational ex-posures' of mail-order frauds, begging letter writers, adulterated foodstuffs, and that sort of thing. If you want to get to know somebody, find out where he's in the habit of lunching," I said, "keep going there and just wait; sooner or later he'll start nodding to you. Big Pat, out of sheer anx-iety, was a compulsive snack eater and could get through hard-boiled eggs as if they were peanuts in

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the bar at the King's Head. I seduced him with goose eggs which are to a hard-boiled egg eater what a magnum is to a champagne drinker.

"He told me flatly, 'I can't give you any assignments. Experienced men are on the street. There's a slump on. And somehow or other, although London is the biggest and dirtiest street on earth, nothing much seems to be happening in the way of good old-fashioned juicy crime. Smell me out something fresh and lively—something to justify a cover story or a double-page spread—and I'll see what I can do for you.'

"I said, 'What would you like me to do—rush out and put somebody into a trunk for the sake of a story?' 'I don't say that,' he said, 'although in *my* time, if you'd been working for me, I'd have told you to get your hat and go out and not come back empty-handed. But this isn't my time, and you aren't working for me, and I don't suppose you ever will be.'

" 'We'll see,' I said, going out. He said, 'No bodies in trunks! Let only a head turn up and the police will start checking all the left-luggage rooms, and sure as fat at least eight or nine torsos will come to light, and the thing will become a farce. And never, *never* try to sell me a snide story. (a) I'd never forgive you for insulting my intelligence, and (b) it ca be done. I was hocusing Anarcl bomb outrages before you we born and thought of.'

"I went away, thinking ha The year was 1923. Livi History was in the making, right. The Sacco and Vanze affair was warming up, the Fren were occupying the Ruhr, talk motion pictures got invented, L dendorff and Adolf Hitler pul off the Beer Hall Putsch Munich, Jack Dempsey knock out Firpo, et cetera, et cete But in London with all its teemi millions, of whom one in thr would end in the poorhouse, o in five had a social disease, o in seven was certifiably mad, o in eleven would end on t gallows, two in five would c of smoke poisoning, whe everybody consumed seven tim his weight in meat and nine tim his volume in beer per a num—I've got the statistic somewhere, and they're bea ties—time seemed to have sto ped.

"Evidently, then, it was up me to help something ha pen . . . If the spitting image the youthful Ignaz Paderews over there will kindly stop clickir his rosary and saying, 'To Buddl for refuge I fly.' I thank you."

You'd imagine that Sir Arthu Conan Doyle would have studie the Sherlock Holmes territor

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ouldn't you? Well, he didn't Swindle Sheet told the class) or e wouldn't have made Colonel foran lie in ambush for Holmes 1 a mews in Blandford Street —there never was any mews in Blandford Street from which you ould overlook any window in Baker Street. I know, because I ved there at that time, over a axi-drivers' café owned by a Neapolitan named Bertazzolo.

("In passing, it's crumbs of bsolutely useless information uch as this that get you talked bout.")

Blandford Street was retty crumby—it was planed obsolescent in the Eighteenth Century. As early as 1805 they tarted having to shore it up. I lo not claim to be one hundred ercent historically accurate, but when in doubt never pause to hink—come out with any old late. Somebody may correct you. Accept correction with gratitude, nd there you are; you've made friend. There's a natural decency n most people; they like to set ou right, and like you for letting em.

About the house I could say his much—playing with loose nds of wallpaper in my room he way one bites one's nails when deep in thought, I have pulled off a lump of cardboard that turned out to be strata and substrata of two hundred years of wallpaper—which, in due course, I turned into the equivalent of $500 through articles in the whimsy-whamsy house-decorating magazines; or the equivalent of four years' rent at the rate Bertazzolo charged me for my attic. The house, long condemned, was full of cracks and the nailed-down bits of tin over the ratholes were like amplifying diaphragms over so many speaking tubes. From my room I could hear every whisper in the house, which was interesting, although disconcerting at first.

Bertie—as everybody called Bertazzolo—was very fond of seamen who had lost their papers, and other cheap and furtive labor. The cook was a Malay, the kitchen boy a Zanzibari stoker; orders were yelled down from the café to the kitchen by Bertie, who had once been an iceman with a voice audible over half a square mile of noisy London. All of a sudden the cracks in the attic floor would erupt with wisps of black smoke from burnt fat and there was a sort of confetti shower of plaster dust while the wall by your ear shouted, "Rump steak, broccoli, marrow, chips, and butter beans!" and the fireplace called it back in Cantonese, "Lump steak blogoloo mallo sips a burra-beal!" and the Zanzibari who, although he had the thickest head on the seven seas, had served under a Scotch engineer and was punch-drink and turned

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everything he heard into a song, bawled from the gas bracket, "Oom-ba, oom-ba, o o m - b a - ba—mallo sips a bullabeal."

Another thing: living in a place like that one got nauseated by the smell of cooking but got fat on steam, like a chef, without eating. Again: it was educational. You came across unforgettable characters. For instance, there was one of Bertie's customers who'd lost his taste buds in a mustard-gas attack in 1917, who always called for kippers and apricot jam. The daughter of the house, Noemi, was the spitting image of Botticelli's Venus, but snored. And about cockroaches I could write a handbook—as well as about bedbugs that could flatten themselves so as to be sent through the mail, thus affording a m a l i c i o u s anonymous-letter writer all sorts of food f o r thought.

As for rats, God bless my soul, Bertie's was a perfect vivarium! The kitchen rats fought the invading rats from the old livery stable nearby, for even the lower forms of life must have a defined place of their own to bleed for. You can learn a hell of a lot about Living History watching rats. I earned myself many a free supper and credit for board and lodging telling old Bertie how to get rid of rats. You catch three or four live rats and put 'em in a wire cage without food or water. In a couple of days you'll fin only two or three. And at las just one, battle-scarred but nic and plump. Turn him loose. A the other rats will leave the house because this is the one thing the fear—a rogue rat, a cannibal . . .

My pretty young friend ove there popped out that s h disagreed; all rats are cannibals Was I telling the truth? she asked

No, it was malarkey. Yet fo one thousand years people hav been happy believing it—it tickle their vindictive imagination. T this bit of Living History th landlord Bertie was particularl attached. He was an interestin character. Day and night I hear him through the cracks, layin down the law.

With capital got by loss of hi boss's stock through evaporatio he left the ice business and bough a hokey-pokey ice-cream cart fo the summer, and a hot-chestnu barrow for the winter. He wa gloomy, and religious, and touchy tempered, and a puritan, but he' starve before he gave s h o r measure. He did well, opened thi café, gave the cabbies g o o value—and oh, my word, th stories that London cabbies coul tell over their chump chops an chips would make Ulysses soun like a mummy's boy!—and h saved every penny. It seemed tha he had a coat of arms, and hi family had been big landowner somewhere near Naples a lon

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ime ago, and he was determined o buy back the family estates.

Every year in the spring, having crupulously paid his English tax- s, he'd pocket the profits in hard ash, go to Italy with as much is a thousand pounds or so (which was nearly $5000, and a lot of money in those days), and buy back another farm or wo, traveling third-class and carrying his own refreshments in a ittle basket along with a spare celluloid dickey and a pair of false cuffs—but always managing to look like a Somebody in his black serge suit, carrying himself with a swagger and sporting a great bone-breaker of an olive-wood walking stick with a Greek patriarch's head for a handle and *Corfu* in silver nails. His son Antonino went in terror of the old fellow, but couldn't help admiring him.

"You got to hand it to him," Antonino said to me—Chicago was fresh in world news at that time, and all the kitchen porters in Little Italies all over the place were talking lopsided and waggling cigarettes at you and dropping names like Johnny Torrio. "You got to hand it to the old buzzard. He only wants a barrel organ and a monkey to look like something out of the comics, but dressed just as he is he'll go anywhere, riding in a donkey cart, and still have respect. Everybody knows that when he goes away on business he's got a million lira in his belt, but in places where they'd cut your throat for a packet of cigarettes nobody lays a finger on him. This I call having respect!

"Blackshirts, Camorristi, Mafiosi, even Don Domani, they all say, 'Ha, ha!' Here comes Mr. Bertazzolo buying back the Roman Empire,' and they give him room to pass—"

I said, "Don Domani? *Domani* means 'tomorrow.' Why that? Because tomorrow never comes?"

"The proverb is different in our province," Antonino says. "We say, 'Tomorrow *must* come. You can't escape Tomorrow.' Don Domani, he's like Whassaname, with feathers in his hat, shooting arrows."

"Hiawatha?"

"Robin Hood. If Don Domani, Mr. Tomorrow, sends you a message saying, 'Such-and-such a place, such-and-such a time, leave such-and-such,' you do like he says. Or it's a case of *Schiopetto, Stiletto o Strada!*"

"Meaning?"

"Barricade yourself, or hop it. *Strada* is the road. A *Schiopetto* is a pistol shaped like a motor horn."

"A blunderbuss. Nowadays a sawed-off shotgun," I said, catching the whiff of a story. "How does he get in touch with you?"

"Oh, Don Domani sends you a sign you can recognize, all right,

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don't worry about that . . . That's what the old man threatens me with if I ever run up a little betting debt again with Mancini—he'll let the Don collect for Mancini and take one of my ears off as a lesson to me."

"How do you get in touch with Domani?"

"You don't—you just drop a word and he gets in touch with you." Poor Antonino says, "One of my *ears* off, gorblimey!" I may say, in parenthesis, that the first word an Italian learns on landing in England is Gorblimey. "And the old tightwad wants me to be a restaurant man. Whoever heard of a maître dee with one ear?

"And confidentially, between us, I already *am* in debt to Mancini and one or two others for a couple of hundred pounds. It's wicked to say so, but I'm glad the Italian lira's fallen so the old crow is going to Italy ahead of his usual time this year—it gives me time to think. And my luck will change."

I scented tragedy, because in Mr. Bertazzolo's absence little Antonino was in charge of the till. *Father Dismembers Son with Ham Knife in Restaurant* would be worth shutting my mouth and waiting for—but I always was soft-hearted.

And so I told Antonino, "As soon as his back is turned, pinch a few hundred more and run away to Canada. I don't say he'd cu your ear off exactly, but I have an idea that your daddy isn't the easiest man in the world to fall foul of—there's something kinc of Ancient Roman about him."

So there was, in point of fact: Claudian; a slightly knocked-about bust of Tiberius with a gnu's-horn mustache and the stump of a Toscani cigar.

"I wish I could," Antonino said, wringing his hands, "but I've got urgent business early April. The Milanese boy, Pep Ricci, is fighting Jack Slack at the Olympia."

"What's urgent or businesslike about that?" I asked him. "Slack will splash the poor little contender all over Kensington. Ricci's not in the same class. If I weren't a topnotch crime man I'd be a sports writer, and I know whereof I speak, Antonino."

"Ah, but you don't know the inside dope," he told me. "I do, and I'll tell you, only you mustn't use it until after the fight, because I got it—seal of confession"—he wet his finger and drew it across his throat—"at the Circolo, the Italian Club. It's a heartbreaking story. Mussolini has got Beppo, Pep's kid brother, in a concentration camp for liberal activities, and has told our boy that if he doesn't beat Slack for the honor of Italy, Beppo is for the high jump. And here's the touching part, Morris—for the kids' poor

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old mother's sake Slack has agreed to throw the fight, and has bet his own share of the purse against himself at five to one! I got five to one, too. That'll get me in the clear, see?"

"How much have you bet on Ricci?" I wanted to know.

When he said, "Five hundred pounds," I told him, "Throw your hat off the Monument and forget to let go of it, you poor dope—for my money, you are earless as a porpoise. Slack has cut-and-dried instructions to let your boy go four rounds and knock him cold in the fifth." Which, incidentally, was what happened, although there was a slight contretemps.

Slack accidentally hit Ricci on the nose in the first round and Ricci fainted at the sight of blood, so that Slack had to carry him around like the Old Man of the Sea for a quarter of an hour before letting him fall to the canvas with a damp thud, while all the Circolo d'Italia cried foul shame and perfidy, and "Corsica, Nizza!" et cetera. However, I digress.

I left Antonino to his spiritual travail and, the long day having waned, sat in the dark and listened to the strange sounds of the quaint old house settling for the night. Yes, I may seem untutored and uncouth to some of you beautiful people, but there is a certain wild and artless poetry in my composition. I thought, if only I could write music, what a suite, or tone poem I might get out of it! In the Russian style, of course, starting off with everybody in the orchestra playing with all his might and main. Then one by one they would drop out, and only one of those huge great tubas would be left—the kind you have to wear around your shoulders—playing variations on a simple theme: Bertazzolo's farewell to his family, with appropriate warnings, orders, threats, promises, blessings, and curses.

We would have to add to the orchestra a West Indian ensemble of rusty gasoline cans—the Zanzibari putting out the garbage, singing "Oom-ba, oom-ba, oom-ba-ba, empty tins and oom-ba-ba." And there'd be a kind of five-figure fugue of feet on stairs, slammed doors, and imprecations. Then a silence like velvet. The old man had gone. Noemi would let fly with *Ah, Was It He My Heart Desired?*—in one of those shuddering contraltos. Mrs. B.'s bedsprings would go off like a calliope as she'd let down her two hundred and fifty pounds. More crumbled mortar would trickle off the doomed brickwork. There would be a sussurus of emerging bedbugs and a ghostly twittering of obese cockroaches dragging sacs of eggs. Soon — *Brek-ek-ek-ek, Coax-coax!*—Noemi subsiding into the

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arms of Morpheus with a serenata for Pharynix, Epiglotts, Eustachian Tubes, and Continuo; and on the roof a cat would chime in, lonely and afraid as a cat might be, adrift on an iceberg. . .

Oh, I'm not an inartistic man. I wrote the lyric of *Joy Takes Forever,* as sung by the Serendips:

Oh, man, watch your step!
What says Deep Blue Midnight?

et cetera. I see by the fermenting appearance of my young lady friend over there—if you cut her wire earrings her head would fly off with a loud bang—that she wants to tell me I got that from a bit of verse by the philosopher Nietzsche:

Oh, man! Take heed!
What saith deep Midnight, indeed?

and so on.

So what? If I am a part of all that I have met, by the same token all that I have met is part of me. Didn't Lincoln borrow the nub of the Gettsyburg Address from Tyndale?

To proceed: I, a kind of lonely genius in my eyrie, was thinking hard. (In the suite this would come in as a continuous, deep organ note.) I had a simple and brilliant idea, and my cortex was humming like a dynamo.

It was, in point of fact, a very poor idea, but I was very young then. *Si la jeunesse savait—Si la vieilesse pouvait!*—as the proverb so wrongly says. Wrongly, because if Youth knew, it wouldn't dare; and if Age could, it wouldn't care. There's something godlike about youth's heedlessness of consequences.

There's an irreverent parable I've often thought of elaborating: Once upon a time there were giants in the universe, bigger than a man as a man is bigger than a microbe, engaged in a losing battle against the Powers of Darkness. "How goes the war?" the King of the giants asked. His General said, "Pretty sticky, Sire; the bastions are napoo, the walls are down, and the Enemy is in the Citadel." The King said, "Alas. But my only remaining son, my baby the backward one who was never quite right since he was hit on the head by a falling planet—how is he?" "Evacuated to the Edge of Beyond, Sire, and playing at Grown-Ups. We gave him a Miniature Creation Kit to fool about with, and at present he's planning psychedelic landscapes and dropping little bits of protoplasm into salty water."

I say, I got this idea, and I worked at it like a fanatic. So, when Slack put Ricci to sleep, and Antonino, telling me that he was now into the till for a matter of 900 pounds, asked if it was really true that a man falling from a great height lost consciousness before he reached the ground, I was able to say, "Be calm, boy,

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and sleep on it. Ten to one you'll get good news within twenty-four hours."

Such was his passion for gambling that, on the verge of knocking himself off, he couldn't help saying, "Take you in quids!" It would have been unethical to bet with him because I was the originator of what was to come.

Here is what I had done: I'd gone to the Continental newspaper shop in Charlotte Street and bought a copy of *La Stampa*. Then I'd gone to the Marylebone Library and, with the aid of a dictionary and a Handbook of Commercial Italian, worried out a more or less literate letter in that noble language—with which I already had a nodding acquaintance: my poor father had hopes I'd go into the dried-fruit import business in Birmingham and had made me take a couple of lessons.

Having drafted my letter I went to work with a pair of scissors and a pot of paste, and the result was a peculiar-looking conglomeration of pasted-up snippets of newsprint which read more or less like this:

Antonino Bertazzolo Esq.,
Honored Sir,

My name is not unfamiliar to you, and you must know that my aim, and that of my organization, is Italian self-determination under the majestic ideal of the Pax Romana, the Roman Peace. I have always been noted for sympathy with the Italian worker and my understanding of his problems. It appears, however, that your respected father, who, since 1919 has acquired several valuable properties upon which he has neglected to pay his contribution to the Fratelli di Napoli, of which I have the honor to be President and Treasurer, is now a landed proprietor, and taxable as such by the Brotherhood. Most of our Fraternities, Confraternities, Unions &c., have been virtually assimilated into the Duce's defense forces. Thus, pending reorganization, dues are payable in the countries in which our esteemed clients find themselves domiciled, and in the currency of these countries. Therefore, pray have the goodness to pay the sum of 1500 pounds sterling in one-pound unmarked notes to our representative, who will call upon you and identify himself within five days from the above date. In the event of your failure to do this, your parent, S. Domenico Bertazzolo, will be liquidated in Naples within the week.

Cordially,
Don Domani

and below the signature I had drawn a neat black hand.

I mailed this to Antonino from Clerkenwell, to get a Little Italy postmark on the envelope. Some of my compositions have made brisk connections with certain of their readers, but I never did a

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scissors-and-paste job that packed such a wallop.

Antonino let out a strangled cry and fell senseless, all in one rigid piece. Mama Bertazzolo didn't fall—her center of gravity was too low, and she could only rock to and fro—but she cried, "The Angel of Death is here! I have heard of this accursed Don Domani, and this means 'Your money or your life—*Schiopetto, Stiletto o Strada.* If we must pay we must pay, and be thankful that the malefactors let us live on a crust."

Antonino, coming to, said, "We should send father a telegram."

She said, "But how? To where? Saying what? I know your father—he would take his stick and cry, 'I dare them to come, the bloody Mafiosi! Unity! I fought with Garibaldi for unity! Down with King Bomba! My money is my living. Take my money and you take my life! Bah!' It is easy for a man to be bold. But for a woman who must bear the children and pray it is not so easy. I know about Don Domani—if he says he'll kill, he'll kill. It may come with a gunshot, a knife cut, it may come on a puff of smoke—tomorrow, next year—but come it will. We must pray . . . and pay."

And later Antonino showed me a biscuit tin wrapped in brown paper and said, "Look at that and weep—fifteen hundred lovely little pound notes in pretty little bundles of fifty! All for Don Domani, just for asking for it—"

"Would you rather they killed your father?" I asked him.

"Ah, it's a lot of eyewash!" he said. "This ain't the old country, we ain't a bunch o' *paisanos.* Times have changed. Any damn Millman Street bum can send a letter—I would like to call their bluff."

"That's how you got rich playing poker with Esposito?"

"Ah, the best player can have a run of bad luck!"

"What have you been up to?" I asked, for he reeked of larceny, and there was a kind of half-whimpering defiance about him that didn't fit. His attitude bagged at the seat and sagged at he waist, so to speak. "I suppose you've been shoving your sticky little fingers into that box of money, is that it?"

"Well, only for a little bit of it. I'm not a religious man, you know, but I do believe in omens and warnings. The morning we got that letter I saw in the paper where Kentucky Joe was due to run at Newmarket on the seventh. Kentucky is a place in America where black man come from—black men have black hands. If ever anything was *meant,* that was; wasn't it? I got the word from Pizzey who got it from the stables that Kentucky Joe's on the job—he'll win in a

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walk, and I got two hundred on him at thirty-three to one!"

"You're pretty hopeless, aren't you?" I said. "I don't go so far as to say that you half hope they *will* knock your father off, you being next of kin—but I shouldn't be a bit surprised. I thought I was going to do everybody a little bit of good all round, but I see benevolence is wasted on you."

He said, "I don't get it."

I said, "No, you wouldn't. Listen, stinker—it's not that I care a twopenny damn about you or your father, but I've got my own way to make in the world and I rather like your mother. You know what your old man will do when he finds out that you've stolen his m o n e y — t o gamble with, to boot? Probably half kill you first and then throw you out of the house, which would annoy the old lady no end. I scissors-and-pasted that extortion letter, you little fool; first and foremost to give myself an exclusive story, and incidentally to give you the wherewithal t o straighten out your horrible little private affairs and leave a little over for pocket money for you and perhaps reimbursement of my out-of-pocket e x p e n s e s, et cetera . . .

"Oh, well. Open up that biscuit tin. Put that nine hundred pounds back where you took it from. You've already blown another two hundred, so there'll be a matter of four hundred pounds left. I *did* have half a mind to argue that your dad was nothing but another hobnailed hanger-on of the latest thing in big-booted benevolent societies, and so to split that four hundred fifty-fifty would only be spoiling t h e Philistines—for, Left or Right, one is as bad as the other. But I recollect that after all I have sat down at his table and drunk his sour wine and eaten his gummy soup and listened to him singing *Giovinezza.* So keep the lot, and much good may it do you.

"Your mother will ask you, 'Has Don Domani's messenger come for the money yet?' " I added. "Tell her, 'It's all weighed and paid, Mama.' Scram now, and let me write my story."

So Big Pat Fox bought *New Murder Threat to London Italians,* and some f o l l o w - u p pieces about secret s o c i e t i e s. Inspired by my resentment of Antonino's p u s i l l a n i m o u s and generally unmanly attitude, I threw my heart and soul into the composition of an Expense Sheet which has since come to be regarded as a classic of its kind, and reinforced forever my nickname on Fleet Street . . .

But a couple of days later, when I'd stepped out to get the Sporting edition of the evening paper, Mama Bertazzolo came to me with an anxious face and said,

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"What is this? Antonino told me, 'Don Domani's messenger came for the money, Mama, and all is weighed and paid.' Well, today came two men in black clothes, and one of them, with a sweet voice but a face like the Angel of Death said, 'Signora, I am here to tell you that the Don will grant your son twenty-four hours, but beyond that he will not be patient.' What does this mean?"

"When was this?"

"Only now. Lunchtime over, Antonino and Noemi go to rest and I mind the shop. The Angel of Death'—she crossed herself—"says, 'Do not distress yourself, Signora. Please to give this to Signor Antonino when he has had his little siesta. Thank you very much.' And he give me this. What shall I do?"

It was a plain manila envelope, unaddressed. I said, "Do like the man said—don't distress yourself. I'll give this to Antonino now. You go back and do your crocheting and treat yourself to a good glass of Strega."

I ran upstairs. Antonino was sleeping with his mouth wide-open and the first two fingers of his right hand firmly crossed. Around his neck were half a dozen assorted holy medallions, a swastika, the long half of a broken wishbone, a blacksmith's nail, a drowned man's finger, part of a donkey's shoe, a rabbit's foot, an amulet that looked as if it contained something nasty, a Jewish *mezuzah*, a miniature Chinese idol made of bonzoline, and an elephants's-hair ring—practically everything the young horseplayer needs to insure good fortune. He even had a carved ebony bracelet, so that he'd never be without wood to touch.

"Wake up, damn you," I said, flicking him in the face with the envelope. "I ought to punch you right in your loose mouth, only I'm to blame for not guessing that the minute you had something that really needed keeping quiet you'd be in and out of every coffee shop between Soho and Clerkenwell squealing your fat head off."

"I don't know what you're talking about." He opened the envelope and went white as a ghost. "Well," he said, "and how d'you like *that?*"

Somebody had taken scissors to another copy of *La Stampa* and clipped and pasted a message that read:

Disobedience is punished with lead and steel but traitors die by fire. You have robbed Don Domani. Confess. Pray. God's mercy is infinite but my patience is short. Cleanse your soul. Then await my messengers tomorrow. Follow them. Bring with you 6600 pounds sterling, neither a penny more nor a penny less.

Antonino yelled, "Sixty-six hundred quid? Who's going crazy

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around here? Who . . . *Let's have a look at that paper!*" He tore my evening sheet out of my hands, held it to the light, looked at the STOP PRESS, and said in a horrible voice, "I had two hundred on Kentucky Joe, to win, at thirty-three to one. Well, Kentucky Joe has gone and won. What's two hundred times thirty-three? And bang goes the whole bleeding lot! What shall I do?"

"Late in the day to ask. Firstly, you shouldn't have bet so high—and that you shouldn't have stolen from your father to bet goes without saying. Secondly, if you had to bet on credit, why did you have to go to a bookie in Little Italy? And thirdly, if you had to go to a bookie in Little Italy, why, of all the petty-larceny small fry, *why* Esposito?"

"You don't know what you're talking about. Esposito got rich on small bettors' sixpences the way Lipton got rich on poor people's penny packets of tea—"

"And the second it comes over the tape that Kentucky Joe romps home at thirty-three to one, he is on the blower to Don Domani, whoever Don Domani is. For God's sake," I said, *"how do you know Esposito isn't Don Domani?"*

I let that sink in and then said, "You were all for calling his bluff when only your father's life was supposed to be at stake. Call it now."

"No, this rings true, somehow," Antonino said, shuddering.

"Well," I said, "it seems all Don Domani wants is Esposito's betting slip, valued at sixty-six hundred quid. Either Esposito or somebody in his office is a Don Domani man, evidently."

"And as for me talking about it," Antonino said, "do you take me for a *perfect* nitwit? May my mother never see me alive again if I ever said one solitary word about that Don Domani note. It ain't the sort of thing a person goes around talking about. By my life and soul I swear it! I swear it on my mother's honor—"

"Swear on this," I said, picking up his rabbit's foot. "Kiss it and swear by your luck."

He did so, and then I knew he was telling the truth.

"What are you writing?" he asked. I was writing myself a note, I told him, about death by fire.

I said, "I don't suppose your Don Domani literally means flames. I think I see a tie-up with the case of that Neapolitan who kept the café in the Fulham Palace Road. Some bloke forced his head into a deep pan of boiling fat, for no reason that was ever given. And round Great James Street a person or persons unknown popped a fellow countryman of yours, a baker named Papagayo, into his own oven, and left on the pastry table a busted flush in clubs with one spade—a

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black hand. Get it? But I daresay much the same effect could be achieved with a coffee urn."

Anybody with half the spirit of a man would have laughed at this and said, "Ah, but who'd drink it afterwards," or something of that sort.

But Antonino covered his sensitive little ears with his sensitive little hands and whimpered, "Don't!" and then: "That damned silly forged letter was all your doing in the first place. You faked it for the sake of a story in your rotten little paper. You got me into this, and you've got to get me out," et cetera, et cetera.

I said, "Oh, I'll stand by. There's something just a trifle too rum about this situation that I want to get to the bottom of. A pencil stump on a penny postcard would be about *your* mob's mark; clipping a newspaper is sophisticated. For the sort of people you associate with, it's almost as refined as not eating minestrone with your hands."

He piped up with, "Italy ruled the world once, and will rule the world again. Italy occupied Britain for five hundred years and taught you all you knew." And all the while he was holding a lemon on a fork and paring it fine with a sharp knife, to see what numerals the coiled peel would suggest when it fell, this being a certain means of predicting the winner of the big race at Doncaster tomorrow afternoon, provided it was done with a silver fruit knife.

History on the hoof, alive and kicking—that was Antonino, if you like. Pale, melancholy, fine-featured. Give him a kingdom and a pack of cards on Saturday night, and by Monday morning the frontiers of Switzerland would be on the Tiber. Proud-looking as Lucifer, dandified, too much of a gentleman to say "please" and "thank you," and brought up not to worship graven images. But give him a pair of dice and he'd be on his knees in the dust praying to them for an eighter from Decatur, howling, "Baby wants new shoes!"

. . . Excuse me—I see a vein throbbing in Miss Burt Shoreleigh's forehead, which means that she has some interpolation to chime in with. I call her Miss Burt Shoreleigh because that's how she says "but surely"—with which ominous words she always prefaces her little interruptions.

She is about to say, "But surely—if the letter you wrote wasn't taken out of the house, and Antonino was telling the truth, isn't it indicated that Mama Bertazzolo fingered her own flesh and blood?"

The answer is: no, she didn't. She couldn't have. It would have been psychologically impossible for her to do such a thing—like sacrilege, or blasphemy, or refus-

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ing bread to a beggar. She was a good woman, as I told you.

Noemi, then, with the aid of a lover? No, again. (a) She didn't have a lover, being—as I forgot to mention—only fourteen years of age; and (b) even if she had, being an astonishingly well-developed girl, she'd never have had the nerve, the viciousness, or the know-how. Make a note in your books that healthy girls who snore are generally of phlegmatic nature.

And if the gentleman in the Mao jacket shaking a Tibetan prayer wheel at me (or whatever it is) has it in mind to say that I'm going to put the blame on the Zanzibari kitchen boy for racist reasons, with some little conbobulative trimmings apropos Black Hands . . . tut, tut, tut! By the by, concerning this exceedingly useful noise, tut, tut, tut, which is made by taking the word *tomato,* swallowing the two o's and the m and the a and spitting out the rest, when one of you is an influential editor he may earn the gratitude of generations by commissioning a typographer to make a symbol for it. Such a symbol may be worth volumes, and would be more useful than the ampersand.

To proceed: the next day I hung about the café eating coconut tarts until Antonino said, "Ain't you going to get dressed? They'll be here any minute."

"Dressed? What am I, then?" I wanted to know. I was wearing old flannel bags and a sports coat, a collar and tie. "What's the great occasion?"

For Antonino was got up like a poodle-clipper's receptionist in pin-striped blue flannel and he had a flower in his buttonhole. "Excuse my mentioning it," I said, "but you're wearing an Old Etonian tie. And by the by, cornflowers are generally worn by gentlemen only on the hunting field."

"You look like a tramp," he said. "A man has got to put up a front." He offered me a cigarette out of a silver case.

"What for? They know your resources, evidently, to the last penny. I hope you've got Esposito's chit on you. For my part, I wish I was wearing a rubber swimming suit, because I never was around the stamping grounds of the 'Youth, Youth, Springtime of Beauty' boys without carrying away a certain amount of livestock."

The conversation was at this sort of level when somebody came in who had to be Mama Bertazzolo's Angel of Death.

He was neither young nor old and neither ugly nor handsome, but his skin had a waxy stillness about it, and certain little wavering highlights that might have come from tall candles. He only wanted a look of mild astonish-

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ment and a trickle of red at the corner of his mouth to look like a brother to any of those French Revolutionary death masks in Madam Tussaud's. His black clothes might have been all front, and didn't look as if they were made to be moved around in: you had the idea that if he turned his back on you (which he never did) you'd see a long white shirt.

"Come, gentlemen," he said, in a low pleasant voice—and a little of the cockiness went out of me; for, to tell you the truth, I could no more believe in this sort of thing happening in London in broad daylight than in fee-fi-fo-fum. As for poor Antonino, all the starch suddenly went out of his Prince of Wales collar, and the Windsor knot in his tie seemed to shrivel to the size of an acorn.

The Angel of Death's fellow messenger was outside at the wheel of a taxi, and he was more like the Mafioso you used to read about in books like *Raffles*—burly, with a huge undershot jaw full of white teeth like seabirds on a shell of rock.

"Have you got Esposito's receipt?" the Angel of Death asked.

"Yes, sir. I—"

"Then give it here."

Antonino passed over the paper and began to splutter, "You see it's like this—"

"Silence."

"I've got over four hundred quid on me. Give me a chance —"

"Silence!" Antonino burst into tears, and the Angel said, "When I say Silence, I mean Silence. Stop making a noise like a choked-up gutter or I'll put your head in a sack."

And soon we were in Italy. I wish it were worthwhile giving you something of the history of this underworld slum, Saffron Hill; but you'd only yawn and play with beads and blurt out 'But surely—.' It's a sort of Casbah. It has a hundred more secret exits than it had entrances. For a couple of hundred years it was the hardest place on earth to catch a criminal in. We stopped at the foot of Great Saffron Hill—does it convey anything at all to you?

In my time every schoolboy knew that the Artful Dodger, having brought Oliver Twist into town by way of Islington, Arlington Street, New River Head, Exmouth Street, Coppice Row, Crawford's Passage, and across Hockley-in-the-Hole, ended at Fagin's dive near Field Lane.

Our cab pulled up at a shop with a painted-over window and a sign that said: *GIORLA & MASSIANIELLO — WAITERS' EMPLOYMENT BUREAU — CORKS EXCHANGE.* A Corks Exchange is a place where they exchange corks; wine merchants set a certain value on their own corks and wine waiters collected them and

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turned them in. It added up to this: the worse and the costlier the wine, the harder it got pushed. Good bottles with sound labels complete with proper corks fetched good prices. The bottles were juice, resin, et cetera. One Napoleon Brandy bottle is supposed to have made the rounds three hundred times. With what tender reverence generations of smoking-jacketed suckers held its contents of marc and sulphuric acid to the light; for there is no such thing as Napoleon Brandy in the first place.

We went through the shop. There were a dozen or so assorted waiters listening to another waiter who was the spitting image of Mussolini. It seems extraordinary how, as soon as a man comes to power, there's a spitting image of him on every street corner; but it's not remarkable, really, because most demagogues are a pretty common type of gutter-snipe, café loafer, and man-about-the-barber-shops.

Moral: the more average-looking the nobody whose corn you step on in a bus, the more profuse your apologies ought to be—for one day that nobody may wear big boots.

So, the cab driver with the big chin led us to the back parlor and the Angel of Death bore up in the rear. A double door was opened and we came into a sort of office—a coke stove, a rolltop desk, a cracked soup plate serving as ashtray and full of cigar butts, three chairs, and an umbrella stand.

The wretched Antonino caught me by the elbow, gripped me tight, and, with an awful choking cry pointed to this last-named item, which was a Victorian affair constructed of stags' antlers. It was empty except for one man's outdoor gear—a highly individual billycock hat, a black waterproof coat as big as a tent, and a whacking great patriarchal-headed olive-wood cane with *Corfu* on the handle in silver nails!

I have seen a tender plant, in growing, push aside a paving stone, and I've seen a blade of grass stab its way through a stick of wood. I have read of—but never seen—how a tallow candle, fired out of a gun, will go right through an oak plank without hurting itself. Well, something of this sort must have happened to Antonino just then.

A chair scraped, and old man Bertazzolo appeared from behind the desk. Antonino shrieked "Mama-mia," and turned and ran. He brushed the Angel of Death aside, but seemed to go right through the heavyweight, Big Chin; he collided so violently with a fat fellow carrying a half a dozen mugs hooked on his fingers that for a moment the air was like a pool in which somebody has

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frightened an octopus, there was such a cloud of atomized black coffee; and then Antonino was gone. They say gambling has something to do with the death wish: I don't know. Antonino was a gambler, and he went meekly enough to Don Domani—the way a man goes to the gallows, with a couple of guards to help him along.

But Papa Bertazzolo he couldn't face.

"Damn fool," the old man said.

"When did you get back?" I asked. "You're not Don Domani? Mr. Tomorrow?"

"A couple days. Yes, I am Don Domani, and I am very angry," he said.

"Let's be fair," I said. "I'm the one who's responsible for that extortion note—it was my idea. I composed it and put the bits together. And I mailed it. Antonino didn't want to go along with it," I lied, "but you know how weak he is. I forced him, more or less. I did it for the sake of a story in *Merrie England,* and didn't touch one penny of your money, Mr. Bertazzolo—"

"What extortion note? What are you talking about?"

"The first one, that was supposed to come from Don Domani, for fifteen hundred pounds."

"I know nothing about this. Tell me it all, from the beginning."

"If you don't know about it, then the whole business becomes comprehensible," I said, and gave him a recap, a precise résumé, of the action from first to last.

"... So where does *your* note to Antonino come in, then?" I wanted to know.

"It's through damn foolishness of this kind that people wake up dead," he said, having heard me out. "But all this that seems so strange to you isn't really strange. Ah, greed, greed, accursed greed, root of all unhappiness!" And he went on at some length about Satan—if only Satan hadn't been greedy, but content with his lieutenant's position in Paradise! "*I* would be honored even to carry out the dustbins and empty the slops in Paradise, but the more you give a greedy person the more he wants."

Human imperfection spoiled the sublimest concepts, he told me: the Mafia, for instance, was originally an organization for the whole family. "Give a little, take a little. Everything mutual—trust, credit, insurance, resources—like the first Christians in the old days, a respectable organization, everybody happy, share and share under a Treasurer. And even here the rats found their way, the holder-outers—enough is not sufficient for them. They wanted to be *Somebodies.*"

Whereas, apparently, under the once quaint and kindly old Black Handers, modesty, humility, obedience, piety, industry, thrift, ea-

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terprise, energy, devotion, faith, hope, charity, chastity, cheerfulness, and courage were what it took; but now any Tom, Dick, or Harry with muscle enough to knock the skin off a rice pudding could claim to be of the Elite.

"No, no, there has been a Don Domani for a hundred years," Bertazzolo said, "nice people—religious, moral, what you call exclusive."

As for the successors of the nice respectable old groups, a shoddy atmosphere had set in. The mobsters of old had real respect. His father wouldn't have ridden a mule with the pedigree of some of the scum that called themselves by the title of Don in Chicago, where at every street corner there was another little gang, so that everybody was perpetually at his neighbor's throat and every time a car backfired, mothers crossed themselves and said, "The accursed Mafiosi again." Well, he was taking good care that no such thing should happen in London.

Here, the elements of silence, anonymity—so essential to the playing of the game as it should be played—should never be ignored while Bertazzolo kept up the majestic ideal of the Pax Domani in Saffron Hill and Soho! Of course, he said, there was always some foolhardy interloper who would chance his arm, some furtive impersonator who would muscle in and make a strike or two. That was inevitable. Any reasonably properous Italian business man with interests in England and abroad has had his share of spurious Black Hand threats in his time, often delivered by hand, the interlopers not having the price of a stamp. So he, Bertazzolo, had placed in his wife's good care a substantial sum of money with instructions to pay any such demand in her husband's absence, and never in any other circumstances to touch one penny.

She, by the way, was quite unaware that Mr. Bertazzolo had anything to do with that legendary extortioner Domani, with whom she had been frightened to sleep as a baby. The money, you see, was all carefully marked. Sooner or later some of it would come the old man's way in Little Italy, and thus he'd run somebody down to make an example of.

"Imagine my shock," he said, "when, among some money from a bookie, I found some of my own private marked pound notes! In the payment of a man called Esposito, handing in his dues to date for Beppo Cura to collect"—old Bertazzolo indicated the Angel of Death—"two hundred of my hard-earned pounds on a godless horse!

"A little questioning, and of course Esposito talks. My own unhappy son has put the money on a carrot disposal-chute and hay

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incinerator on broken legs called Kentucky Joe—and devil take him, had won at thirty-three to one by some miracle of the hypodermic-syringe boys! So that, what's more, if Esposito pays he must beg off his dues to me for the rest of the season, or render Antonino's betting debt legally uncollectable by causing him to be dead; which is my department. Esposito does not know, of course, that Don Domani and Mr. Bertazzolo are one and the same person, and I should in effect have contracted to kill my own son! It would be too good for Antonino, but still there are certain things a father can't do in this day and age.

"In the old days of Rome—which shall return—a father was entitled. But . . ." The old boy smiled and said, "All's well that ends well. 'Honor your debt,' I tell Esposito, '*and* pay your dues, or operate elsewhere.' About Antonino I can do nothing. Until the next time. Then I think maybe I send him to Australia: Alas, I fear Don Domani dies with me; the boy is weak, and of impure soul . . .

"But it was you, Mr. Morris, who made that plan and wrote the letter that Mrs. Bertazzolo will show me when I go home?" I said yes, and given a bit more time I'd do better if need be.

He asked, "You took no money. Just for a story for this *Merrie England*? The one that takes only advertisements for stuff they guarantee, and puts on them *M E—Marked Excellent*?"

I said, "That's right."

He said, "I am pleased that you put in that story about me—it covers my identity so much more. But look, you: no more stories about Don Domani, about Mr. Tomorrow."

I said, "You can't scare the Fourth Estate, not in England you can't, mister."

He said, "Oh, I'll see to it that you have stories. In the meantime, take pencil and paper and I will give you something. First: Gandolfo in Lamb's Conduit Street does a mail-order business in parts for wireless sets. They are mostly faulty and not as advertised. He advertises in your paper. Tell him to pay double rates or you'll take off the *M E* mark and expose him. The same goes for Bellini, in the Theobald's Road: 'Make Big Money Selling Dehydrated Vegetables—Small Deposit Secures Regular Income.' Tchah! Also, 'I Made Twenty-five Pounds Last Week in My Spare Time Selling Bohemia Leatherite Shoes.' Pouf! Your manager pays you a commission, you pay me one-fifth."

I said, "Like hell I do. I'm the working press, and don't play such games. I'll not say no to something of my finder's expenses

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from the advertising department, but I'll be damned if I split it."

He said, with a sigh, "Yes. This way of thinking leads, I suppose, to what Il Duce calls 'the Anglo-Saxon hegemony.' Have it your way—I'll give you funny stories."

So he did, and it was some while before I realized he'd made me his unpaid hatchetman. . .

But I established the first Gangland Column in the world, and since it was out of the question to reveal sources of information, it would have done your heart good to see how I walked all over the Accounts Department in the course of earning my sobriquet of "Swindle Sheet."

And, by the by, when he got around to reading my extortion letter old Bertazzolo said, "This is fine, and full of genuine noble sentiment—authentic, only better! Join us and I will make you an honorary Neapolitan!"

Living History, what a gorgeous little hussy you are! . . .

"And it was at this point," Swindle Sheet told us at the Grub Street Club, "that the bottle-necked girl bobbed up again and said, "But surely—what you've told us is not Living History. I disagree! It was only a mess or arguable points, questionable generalities, personal observations, atmosphere, and bare-faced faking!"

"Don't you ever underestimate the power of what you call Atmosphere," I told her, "just because you can't eat it, drink it, make love to it, or chuck paint at it. Atmosphere is that little bit of everybody which belongs to everybody else—psychic detritus that rubs off as you pass through. Every room you ever slept in is haunted—by you.

"So study to be an amiable ghost, my dear, because one of these dark nights you may meet yourself in the passage. And as for what you so impertinently call faking—well, when you are as old and gray and full of sleep as I am, Burt Shoreleigh, you'll have learned that if History depended for its life on the bare facts of material things, civilization would have perished from the earth a donkey's years ago."

"I disagree," she said.

Then I took a squint-eyed dekko at the envelope I'd been given to make sure my check was there, and made my getaway. But not before some joker had stuck a *Make Love, Not War* sticker to the back of my coat with epoxy glue that won't come off, and a Flower Child had filled my hatband with marigolds. They ain't bad kids, only so jejune they reconcile a bloke to being decrepit.

"No doubt they'll grow up, but God knows where *to*—I don't. It's going to be no fun at all when they find they've got to learn to suffer a bit—after Pandora opens the Box . . ."

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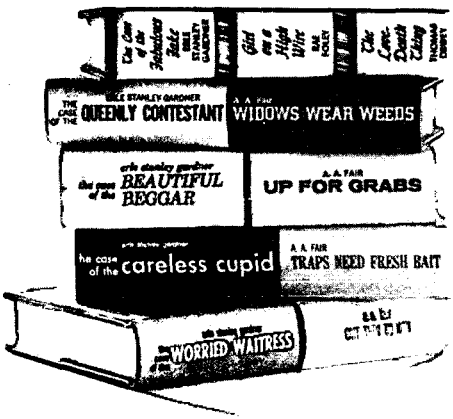

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